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ISSUE NO 31
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WHAT IF.....?
CHRIS CLAREMONT HAD STAYED ON THE X-MEN?
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MADMAN ANALYSED
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A VISIT TO EXTREME STUDIOS
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CONTENTS

COMIC WORLD · ISSUE 31 · SEPTEMBER

4 **NEWS**
Marvelannounce deluxe X-books, Image announce X-month

17 **SMOKE DAMAGE**
Warren Ellis reveals his thoughts on Jack Kirby

27 **MICHAEL ALLRED**
Paul Birch analyses the man behind the Madman

32 **BIZARRE BOYS**
Stephen Jewell seeks The Invisibles with Grant Morrison and Steve Yeowell

40 **CHRIS CLAREMONT: WHAT IF..? PART 2**
Dez Skinn continues his interrogation of Chris Claremont

48 **EXTREME IMAGES**
Alan Porter explores Extreme Studios

50 **REVIEWS**
Richard Hill and Steve Cook investigate more comics

53 **MULTI MEDIA**
Jeremy Clarke purrs over Fritz the Cat, Pete Taylor growls at the BBFC

Everything's relatively quiet at the moment in the world of comics whilst retailers and publishers react to the confused buying trends of the last two summers by sitting back and seeing what happens this year. DC's *Zero Hour* seems to be the summer hit at the moment, but we'll have to wait and see what the sell-through to fans is like and their reaction before we can deem it a resounding success.

So with nothing much to write about I thought I'd answer a few of the questions that have come into the office. A few people spotted reviews of a book in the broadsheets and were wondering whether "that" Steve Holland was "this" Steve Holland...well, yes it is. In my secret identity, when I'm not being Captain Comic, I write for other people. Most of it is for fanzines, which are the best hunting ground for talent around (I'm not implying any talent on my behalf, but I type fast), plus the occasional book, mostly about British publishing and a variety of stuff which best falls into the catagory of "popular culture". With Phil Harbottle I did a book in the States which has sold out (in both hardcover and softcover; it's due to be reprinted in October along with a second book from the same publisher) and the latest, *The Mushroom Jungle* appeared in softcover in the UK and seems to be doing well; I've also been involved in the *Comic Book Price Guide* for the past six years, compiling the British section and writing the introduction (so Hi to everyone who came along to the recent signing, even if it was to see John Bolton and not me) and there's a *Paperback Price Guide* lurking in the wings which was going to be launched this year but has now been held over until next Spring for launching in the USA. There are plenty of small press booklets floating around with my name attached as well, mostly about British comics history. There's a couple of other projects being cooked up at the moment which I'll tell you about when they come to fruition.

That takes up most of my time when I'm not writing and editing *CW*, and just part and parcel of being a jobbing writer for a living. It always struck me as odd that people become so obsessed with comics that they want to spend their time purely writing strips...perhaps it's just me, but again it strikes me that if your one and only interest is comics you're not going to explore and experience much outside costumed heroes, and perhaps that's a poor CV to present to any publisher. If you want to write comics, get plenty of experience outside comics because all writers have to be jacks of all trades and know a little about everything - and if you don't, at least know which reference book to look it up in. (And, yes, I have written and had comic strips published).

Anyway, that's what keeps me occupied in the evenings. That and reading comics, of course.

I've a letter here from John Lawrence, who tells me that Ron Turner, who was the star of a feature in last month's issue, is willing to take on commissions for work and anyone who wishes to contact John (Ron's agent) is welcome to contact him via the editorial address.

Just enough space for this: congratulations to john Edwards, Eamonn Ryan, Aaron O'Farrell, Ravi Kotecha, Josh Scutchings and Neil Garrett who were the winners in our recent Superman competition, and to Roger Noble and N.M.J. Miller who were our Martha Washington competition winners. You should all have received your prizes by now, but congratulations again.

Contributors: Paul H.Birch, Jeremy Clarke, Steve Cook, Neil Cooper, Warren Ellis, Richard Hill, Stephen Jewell, Dave McLoughlin, Alan H. Porter, Dez Skinn, Peter Taylor

Cover: The Ultimate Conspiracy begins this month with an exclusive look at The Invisibles. Grant Morrison & Steve Yeowell conspire to bring you Vertigo's latest ongoing monthly. The Invisibles are © Grant Morrison, and he doesn't want to see you using them without permission. That's if you *can* see them.

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X-MEN DELUXE

Beginning with titles shipping in September, Marvel's X-Men family of comics will be available in a new deluxe format printed on 35lb mando (Fanfare) paper stock, and will feature state-of-the-art computer colouring. The titles honoured thus will be Generation-X #1, Uncanny X-Men #318, X-Men #38, Cable #17, Excalibur #83, Wolverine #87, X-Factor #108, and X-Force #40. The new format titles will retail at $1.95, and copies will ship two weeks before the standard newsprint editions, still priced $1.50.

The decision to produce the deluxe editions was, according to Marvel's Director of Marketing, Sven Larson, because "There's been a real desire in the comics market among fans for high production values in comics. At the same time, there has been a strong reluctance at Marvel to raise the cover price of any of our comics.

"In essence it's up to you, the fans, to send a message to us at Marvel and your local comic shops as to where we go from here. Should we continue this format on the X-titles? Should we return to the newsprint format? Should we continue to offer both formats? Should all Marvel titles be in the deluxe format, or should we reserve it for certain titles? We're all in this together, so make your voices heard."

MANAGERIAL CHANGES AT MARVEL

Confirming last month's news of a change in its managerial structure, Marvel Entertainment have announced that Bruce L. Stein is joining the company as President, Chief Operating Officer and a director of Marvel. Stein has a background in boys' and girls' toy lines, and until recently was President of Hasbro Inc.'s Kenner Products, with whom he had worked for seven years. Terry Stewart, President of Marvel since 1990, is now President and Chief Executive Officer of Marvel Comics, Marvel Entertainment's publishing arm. Under Stewart, Marvel have tripled their publishing business and began diversifying with the acquisition of Fleer Corp., the trading card company, the confectionery company Double Bubble, and toy marketing company Toy Biz.

Four other executive appointments have also been announced, most relating to the Fleer group, one - Jerry Calabrese - for the post of Marvel Consumer Marketing, the company's new marketing unit.

IMAGE PLAY MUSICAL TITLE & MARC SILVESTRI LEAVES H

In September, Image play one of their strangest games yet: following the confusion of the recent "issue 25" month, where various Extreme titles leapt out of sequence into future-planned storylines, and in the wake of Spawn dropping two issues because they were running late (which would have made them returnable - the published #21 arrived on the last day it was allowed before it too would have become returnable), Image announce Image X Month, otherwise known as Mystery Creator Month.

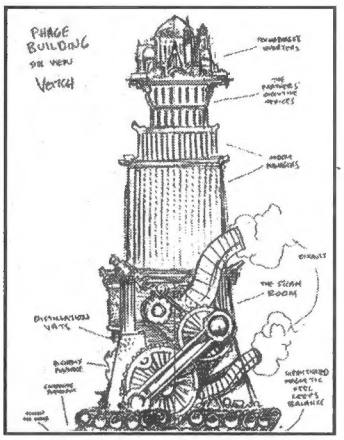
The six core Image titles and six of the seven founders of Image will switch titles for one month. The September released [allowing for the usual delays - Steve] issues affected are: Cyberforce #8, Savage Dragon #13, Shadowhawk #0, Spawn #25, WildC.A.T.S. #14, and Youngblood #19. And although Image are keeping tight lipped about who will be doing what, the latest issue of Wizard claimed insider information for the following: Todd McFarlane will draw Erik Larsen's Savage Dragon, Larsen will draw Marc Silvestri's Cyberforce, Silvestri will draw Jim Lee's WildC.A.T.S., Lee will draw Rob Liefeld's Youngblood, Liefeld will draw Jim Valentino's Shadowhawk, and Valentino will draw McFarlane's Spawn.

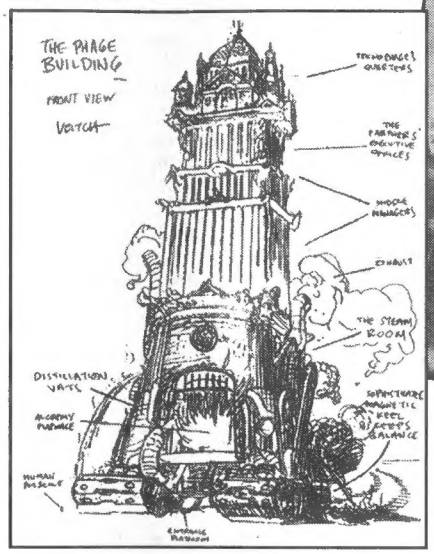
This will certainly test the popularity of the creators and their creations: McFarlane and Spawn, for instance, have always led the popularity stakes, but whilst his fans may enjoy seeing him work on another character - Savage Dragon having already guested in Spawn - will fans remain

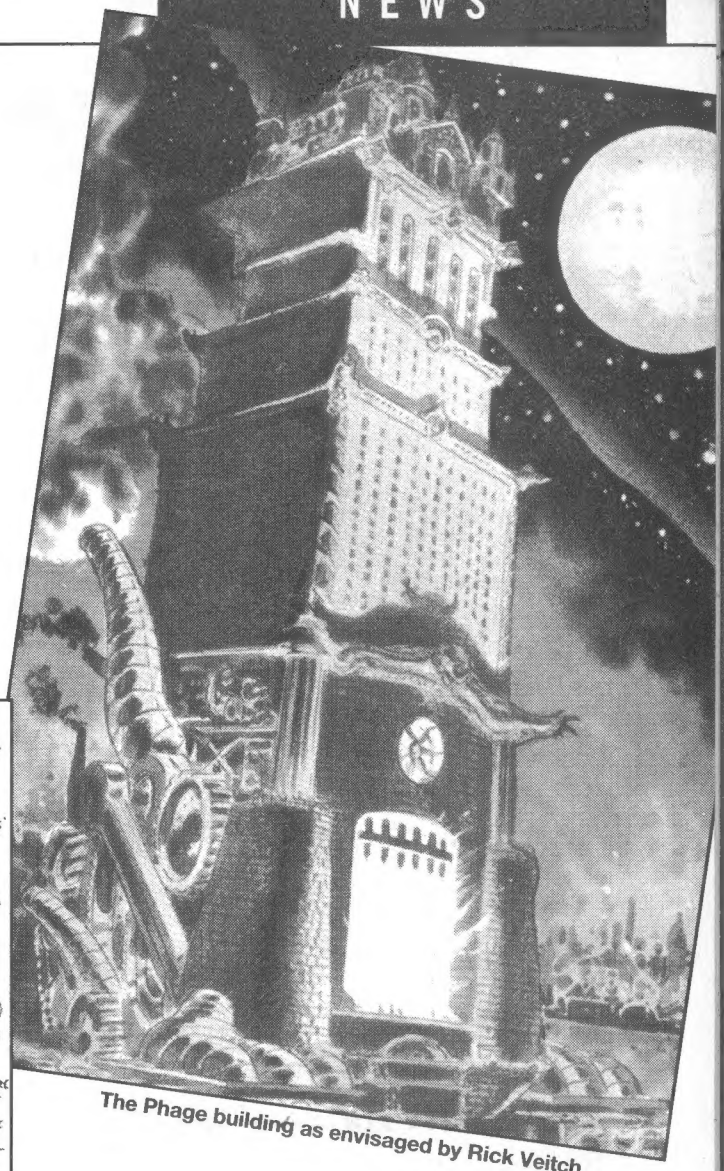
TEKNO COMIX: OPENING SHOTS FROM THE BIG GUNS

The first releases from Tekno Comix are due to solicit in September, amongst them a new series created by Neil Gaiman - one of two he is working on. The Tekno line-up, although strong, had previously concentrated on sf writers and tv personalities as the driving force behind their line, and was severely lacking in one area: big names from the world of comics itself.

Tekno's launch line-up will include Mr Hero - the Newmatic Man, created by Gaiman, written by James Vance (of Kings in Disguise) and pencilled by Ted Slampyak, the story of a steam-driven robot (and out of which will spin Teknophage in early 1995, to be written by Rick Veitch), and Leonard Nimoy's Primortals, the story of a returning group of aliens who had long-ago saved specimens of Earth's most promising creatures; with artificial intelligence, these Primortals now want to reclaim their planet. Scott Eaton & Mike Barreiro are the artists.







The Phage building as envisaged by Rick Veitch

ES HOMAGE

loyal to Spawn himself? A twenty-fifth issue would normally be more than enough reason to hang out the bunting and celebrate with a shiny or lumpy cover (which McFarlane has thankfully avoided so far)...but, of course, this is only the twenty-third released issue.

Marc Silvestri is leaving San Diego-based Homage Studios which he shares with Jim Lee for a new studio in Los Angeles in order to aid Top Cow Production's (Silvestri's company) growth in various media. Silvestri's inker on CyberForce, Scott Williams, will continue to work out of Homage.

Meanwhile, Jim Lee's replacement whilst on sabbatical will be James Robinson & penciller Travis Charest who start with #15, although previously announced as #14.

★★US NEWSBRIEF★★

US NEWSBRIEF AARDVARK-VANAHEIM

The 'Mothers & Daughters Book Three' storyline concludes with episode 12 in Cerebus #186, released in September.

ACADEMY COMICS

Robotech returns after a two year hiatus. Previously published by Eternity, the new imprint Academy will continue the numbering and creative teams from the earlier series. Hence their first releases will include Robotech: Aftermath #7 by Rosearik Rikki & Tavisha Wolfgarth, Robotech: Return to Macross #13 by Bill Spangler & Wes Abbott, Robotech II: The Sentinels Book III #9 by Jason & John Waltrip, plus - to help new and forgetful readers - Robotech #0 by Bill Spangler & William Jang, a useful jumping in point revealing the background of the ten-year-old animation adaptation, the history of the Robotech universe and interviews with the creative teams behind the three Robotech titles.

CALIBUR

Colleen Doran illustrates the latest lyric in Alan Moore's 'Songbook' series, and there's strips by Brian Bolland, Jim Calafiore, David Jackson & Phil Wagstaff, Dave Louapre & Bill Koebs, Jeff Nicholson, plus more classics desecrated by Doug Wheeler and guest desecrators Ken & Mark Lester.

COSMIC COMICS

Roger Corman and Concorde (New Horizons Corp) have announced a new line of comics, to be called Roger Corman's Cosmic Comics. Corman, well-known for his legendary 'B' movie career, hopes to bring the same attitude to comics, producing fast-paced, funny, sexy comics. Editor for the new line is Robert Boyd, previously with Fantagraphics and Dark Horse.

Death Race 2020, an ongoing monthly, will be their first release, in March 1995, a comic-book follow-up to the Death Race 2000 movie which starred Sylvester Stallone and David Carradine. April should see Welcome to the Little Shop of Horrors, based on Cormen's classic 1960 film, and May the debut of another Cormen creation, The Wasp Woman. Other planned titles include Bram Stoker's Burial of the Rats, Carnosaur and Rock 'n' Roll High School.

CRUSADE COMICS

What is it about the sudden popularity of girls in comics? Along with Lady Death (from Chaos! Comics), Crusade's Shi seems to have taken the shops by storm. Shi #4 sees the title switch to monthly publication, and concludes the back-up 'Arashi Memoirs' history of of Shi's nemesis as well as continuing the story of her obsession to destroy him.

DARK HORSE

The booklet accompanying the CD movie soundtrack of The Mask: Music from the Motion Picture has its first

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seven pages dedicated to a mini-comic written by Mike Richardson with art by Killian Plunkett & Bruce Patterson.

Meanwhile, Dark Horse continue their domination of the summer's new release schedule with another batch of one-shots, collections and new titles.

The latest James Bond is a 3-parter entitled Quasimodo Gambit in which Bond finds himself in Jamaica facing a notorious arms dealer, an evangelical order called the Disciples of the Heavenly Way and one of their members, Maximillian 'Quasimodo' Steel.

If your taste's are a little more hard-boiled than Bondian, there's Johnny Dynamite a new 4-part crime/horror/thriller from the pen of Max Allan Collins with art by Terry

Beatty, the creative team behind Ms Tree.

But if your taste's are positively for the pulps, there's The Shadow and the Mysterious Three, three stories in one comic: 'Cold Day in Hell', 'Ceiling Zero' and 'Fate's Free Fall'. There's also a trade paperback of the Joel Goss, Mike Kaluta & Gary Gianno The Shadow: In the Coils of Leviathan.

The latest Comics' Greatest World hero to get his own title is Hero Zero #0 who encounters a life-force absorbing menace in the desert.

Resolicited to tie-in with the movie, is the movie tie-in Time Cop Movie Adaptation, based on the Jean-Claude Van Damme movie based on the Dark Horse comic serial. Time Cop co-creator Mark Verheiden writes and Ron Randall draws.

Indiana Jones & the Shrine of the Sea Devil is a one-off reprinting of the serial from Dark Horse Comics #3-6 by Gary Gianni, now on The Shadow.

Mike Mignola's Hellboy: Seed of Destruction is gathered together as a trade paperback along with two difficult to find items - the four-page introduction from the 1993 San Diego Comic-Con Comic and the four-page preview from Comic Buyer's Guide. There's also pin-ups and unseen art by Mignola.

DEFIANT

Defiant celebrate their first anniversary with the release of the Defiant Anniversary Trade Paperback reprinting zero issues of Dark Dominion, Plasm, Charlemagne and The Origin of the Defiant Universe, and, printed for the first time, zero issues of Glory and The Great Grimmax.

More seen-for-the-first-time artwork, this time from John Bolton: Dark Horse are reprinting The Black Dragon, written by Chris Claremont and previously published as a 6-issue mini-series by Epic Comics where the colouring was frankly awful. This trade paperback is printed from John's original b/w artwork, and includes the 6 original covers, plus a new colour cover.

Visions: The Art of Arthur Suydam is a one-off oversized softcover with commentary by Franz Henkel, a retrospective of Suydam's career to date reprinting hundreds of illustrations and covers in both b/w and colour.

Dark Horse Comics #25 is to be the final issue, but it will be replaced with a Comics' Greatest World anthology title.

EVENT COMICS

Joe Quesada & Jimmy Palmiotti have recently announced the formation of Event Comics, a new Chicago-based publishing company whose first release will be Ash, a superhero book featuring a firefighter turned hero written, pencilled and inked by Quesada/Palmiotti and edited by Event co-founder Laurie Bradach. Each issue will be solicited when completed, and a staggered schedule is expected.

FANTACO

Brit-packers Noel Hannan and John Welding are behind the new monthly Guardians of Eden set in a future where technology and religion have combined to produce the perfect being.

FANTAGRAPHICS

Peter Bagge's award winning Hate returns after a six-month break in October on a new five-time-a-year schedule, and in colour. Jim Blanchard joins as inker and embellisher with #16 which will continue the story begun in #15.

In September they have The Biologic Show by Al Columbia (remember him? He almost did Big Numbers and has had stuff in Deadline) which was previously solicited by Starhead Comix.

For fans of Jim Woodring, there's the Frank trade paperback of all-new stories including Frank's origin told for the first time.

IMAGE

Due to an administrative cock-up in the USA, copies of Deathblow #5 are a bit thin on the ground in the UK as no initial orders were received here, and due to Image's notorious late shipping, nobody worried or wondered about it until a few re-solicitations turned up. Image won't be bothering to reprint the missing issue for British fans as Marvel did some time ago when an issue of Epic failed to make it over the waters.

September is Image X Month but you'll find details of that elsewhere in these pages. Let's concentrate on the new stuff. Badrock and Company is a 6-issue mini-series spotlighting the Rob Liefeld-created Youngblood

teamster as he battles his way through the Image universe. For the first issue he's pitched against Pitt in a tale penned by Keith Giffen with pencils by newcomer Todd Nauck. In upcoming issues the guests include

StormWatch, Freak Force and WildC.A.T.S.

In the near future from Extreme, expect to meet Kid Supreme, who's set to debut in Supreme #13...and who could the mystery writer of Youngblood Year One be? None other than Kurt Busiek, writer of Marvels...

From Homage in September, WildC.A.T.S. Adventures is based on the animated series, adapted by Jeff Mariotte & Ty Templeton (Ty being the man who made such a masterful job of the Batman Animated adaptations).

And there's the WetWorks Sourcebook, everything you ever wanted to know about the team that went missing for two years plus some pin-ups.

IMMORTAL COMICS

Picking up the bits left over from Axis, Beau Smith, Jim Callahan & Tim Dzon present Dethgrip who debuted in Axis Alpha. In the opening episode we may learn Dethgrip's connections with Tod Johnson & Larry Stroman's Tribe, who have strong connections with the series. The first four issues of the series (the first two are being solicited together) contain coupons redeemable against a limited edition collectable.

KING HELL

Neil Gaiman is writing a back-up feature to Rick Veitch's Rare Bit Fiends #2-3 which Veitch, who will be drawing it, describes as "more fun than a month of psychoanalysis", being a distillation of Neil's dream diary.

KITCHEN SINK

At long last readers will be able to enjoy James Robinson & Phil Elliott's graphic novel Illegal Alien which was originally announced many years ago as 'Best Times of Our Lives'. Set in 1963 it involves gangsters, mods & rockers, aliens and the C.I.A. It all makes sense when you read it...honest.

MALIBU

Malibu's Ultraverse has been a resounding success for the company, recently generating the first ever issue zero video release (Firearm #0) and voted Best Universe Launch of 1993 at Diamond Distributor's Gem Awards ceremony in June. The latest addition to the Ultraverse product line is a deal with Lewis Galoob Toys who design, develop and market toys and video games worldwide. Several of the Ultraverse's central characters are likely to be developed, and details of an animated series for launch in 1995 are expected shortly.

This month sees a one-month crossover between various titles under the banner title of 'Hostile Takeover'. The seeds were sown in last month's Prototype #13, and the story is previewed in Hostile Takeover Ashcan, a 16-page charting of the Hostile Takeover storyline, including interviews with the creators and due to ship one week ahead of the main story itself which runs through The Night Man #12, Solitaire #10, The Solution #13, and a special 40-page Giant-Size Prototype #1. The Ultras aren't just heroes - they're big business, and the time is right for a rival to make a move

on UltraTech Tower. Buying shares through holding companies the story builds on one level into a corporate battle, on another into a battle between Ultras.

Giant-Size Rune #1 launches part one of 'The Rise of the Gods' with a 40-page special following the predictions of the Runic Stones that a new dark age ruled by ancient Gods is imminent. There's a back-up 8-pager revealing how Rune got his stones. The title returns to its normal size and numbering next month, but do note that as of #7 Barry Windsor-Smith will no longer be drawing the book. Javier Saltares, best known for his work on Ghost Rider, is the new penciller for the series. Windsor-Smith will continue his association with the title, as editor.

UltraForce #0 reprints the two-part series that appeared in Wizard, a prequel to UltraForce #1 describing how Prime, Hardcase and Prototype assembled the UltraForce team to defend themselves against Atalon. If that's not enough, there's the UltraForce #1 Ashcan also available in September and the official handbook of the Ultraverse, Ultraverse Year One, a 48-page guide to the Ultraverse Universe.

Under the Bravura imprint, Malibu have the Breed Collection in softcover, gathering up the six-issue mini-series by Jim Starlin, the first four issues of which have been recoloured. There's an interview with Starlin, sketches and all the usual tpb additions.

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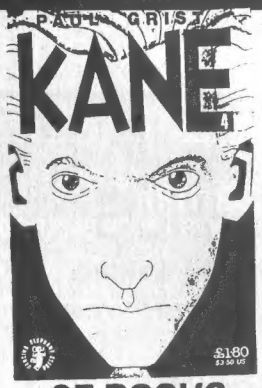

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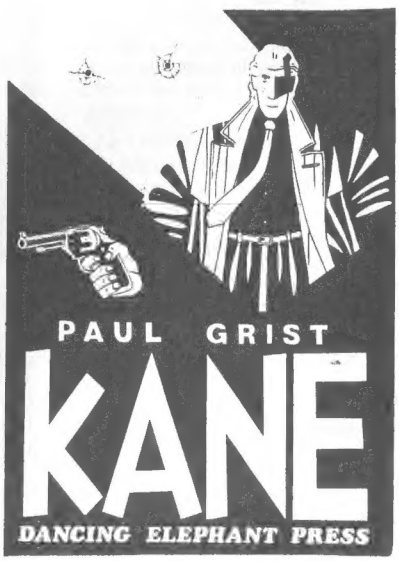

SPIDERBABY GRAFIX

Spiderbaby emerges from the wastelands of the demise of Taboo with the release of Steve Bissette's Tyrant #1, the story of the birth, life and death of a single Tyrannosaurus Rex, a graphic novel which Bissette will be publishing in bi-monthly chunks. Not just a comic alone, Tyrant includes up-to-the-minute scientific background on the current state of dino-research, an ongoing appendix (a la From Hell), a look at other dinosaur-related projects and the first 21 pages of story. It sounds incredibly ambitious.

TOPPS

Cadillacs & Dinosaurs: The Wild Ones is a 3-issue series by Roy Thomas & Esteban Maroto. The Wild Ones of the title are a female biker gang, and they've their sights set on Jake Tenrec. Also includes a special back-up feature, 'Heart's Desire' by Steve Stiles. Obviously expected to run, our own David Roach is currently drawing a sequel.

VALIANT

Valiant have announced that they will be discontinuing their 'Valiant Vision' as a result of contractual problems between valiant and the company which supplies the film used in the Valiant Vision glasses. Although Valiant have cancelled the Valiant Vision Starter Kit: Psi-Lords, the first six issues of the comic are expected to be coloured for anyone who still has their glasses from previous Valiant Vision kits.

Kevin VanHook & Louis Small Jr are at the helm for the Chaos Effect Epilogue], a two-part series, both of which will appear in September and in which Magnus' adventures in 1994 are revealed.

Dan Abnett & Andy Lanning are the new writers on Ninjak, taking over with #11 and introducing a new costume for the warrior. Mike Baron is the writer/artist of Shadowman Yearbook #3 which concentrates on the turn-of-the-century Shadowman, Maxwell St. James and one of his encounters with Armstrong, of Archer & Armstrong fame.

VIZ COMMUNICATIONS

Viz are releasing the first issue of Dirty Pair Anime Comics, adapted from the scripts and cels of the Japanese OAV series into five-issues of 48-pages. The opening shot sees the 'trouble consultants' looking into some problems caused when a city computer goes on the blink.

Also released is Crying Freeman: Journey to Freedom Vol 1, the first of two graphic novels reprinting the first half of Crying Freeman Book Five.

★★UK★★ NEWSBRIEF

BLACKBALL

Still sporting a London address so that makes 'em British in our books. Blackball's September release will be Radical Dreamer #3 by Mark Wheatley wherein the Reality Knight faces a battle with the Dream Network Corporation as he attempts to escape across the city with the corpse of Max Wrighter and a kidnapped DreamNet researcher. If you've not seen Radical Dreamer it comes in a totally different format: looks like a thin comic from the outside but folds out into a 16-page, double-sided poster, or the world's largest 2-page comic, if you prefer.

BOXTREE

Boxtree continue their new graphic novel line with the release of The Mask movie adaptation, The Shadow movie adaptation, both priced £6.99, and the latest X-Men collection, God Loves Man Kills by Chris Claremont & Brent Anderson - a classic in which the X-men face the Reverend Stryker and his army of mutant-killing Purifiers - priced £5.99.

FLEETWAY

The Autumn promo issue of 2000AD is set for Prog 904 with an all-new line-up. **SPOILER WARNING** for all those who don't want to know plot details: 'Wilderlands' is the latest Dredd epic by John Wagner & Carlos Ezquerra, with Dredd sent to Titan for falsifying evidence against the Mechanismo robot. But the transport ship carrying Chief Judge McGruder, Dredd and civilian passengers crashlands on Hesta, the Tenth Planet, stranding the group in a hostile environment, stalked by an unknown assassin; in 'Metrobolis' Robo-Hunter tracks missing robots to an

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OPENS MIDDAY

underground society of mechanical contrivances in a story by Peter Hogan & Rian Hughes; in 'Hellbringer' Deadlock gathers the scattered ABC Warriors together once more to deal with a deadly threat from the Terran Empire, the Hellbringer, a huge ship with a black hole at its heart as envisaged by Pat Mills, Tony Skinner & Kev Walker; 'The Confessions of Harry Exton' is the second book of Button Man, relocating Harry to the USA with a new face and identity care of John Wagner & Arthur Ranson; and Grant Morrison, Mark Millar & Steve Parkhouse say 'Wotta Lotta Balls!' via Big Dave whose heading to the USA to salvage England's pride and win the World Cup with the help of a resurrected Nobby Stiles.

Looking ahead, Prog 908 should see 'Red Razors' by Mark Millar & Nigel Dobbyn, 'Skizz III' begins in Prog 912 along with a new Bix Barton yarn, and Dredd will be finding himself in 20th Century New York in a forthcoming Wagner/Burns/Frecho tale.

The Judge Dredd Megazine gets a new look from issue 63 - and there's a chance to win £5,000 in cash or goods with a special scratch card competition. Inside you can continue the 16-part Dredd crossover 'Wilderlands', with art here by Trevor Hairsine. The ever busy John Wagner also pens the new 10-part 'Son of Mean Machine' for artist Carl Critchlow; Missionary Man is back for a 4-parter, 'Treasure of the Sierra Murder' by Gordon Rennie & S.B. Davis; Brit-Cit's hardboiled detective, Armitage, returns in David Stone & Charles Gillespie's 'City of the Dead' with a prologue from Peter Doherty; and Colin McNeil guests on the Calhab Justice 10-parter 'McTash' written by Jim Alexander.

VICTOR GOLLANCZ

Terry Pratchett's Mort is receiving the graphic novel treatment at the hands of Graham Higgins, and due for release in September. Some advance artwork has snuck into the office, and it looks like being the best adaptation yet, with Pratchett personally involved this time. Look out for an interview with Higgins to appear in these pages shortly.

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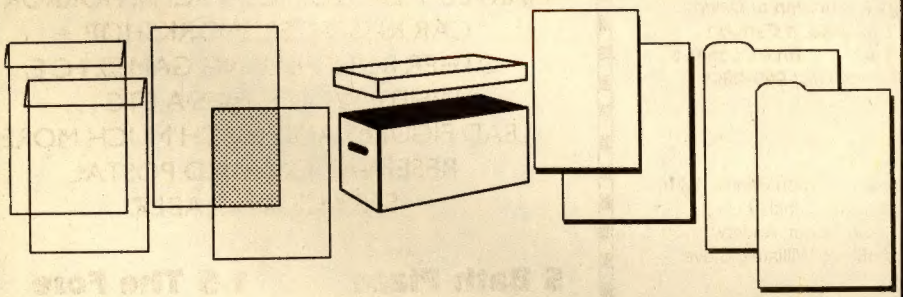

Just Comics

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Due in October is the long-awaited Gaiman/McKean collaboration Mr. Punch, but we'll reveal more about that in our interview with McKean next month.

HAWK BOOKS

Patrick Hawkey has announced the ninth deluxe Dan Dare collection, to contain three stories from the 1959 crossover era when Frank Hampson left and Frank Bellamy joined. The three stories in the latest edition are 'Safari in Space' in which Dan is persuaded to set off on a mission which could reveal what happened to his father. In 'Terra Nova' Dan sets off to the distant planet, and in 'Trip to Trouble' attempts to re-create his father's last known movements.

MANGA PUBLISHING

Manga Publishing - ex-Dark Horse International - release their first ongoing monthly title since they were founded in the shape of Streetfighter II. Adapting the beat-'em-up computer game which is also due to hit the silver screen with Jean Claude Van-Damme in the lead role, the ongoing monthly debuts on August 30 with a September cover date.

The comic reprints the adaptation by Japanese artist Masaomi Kanzaki whose work has already appeared in the USA in an 8-issue mini-series. Each issue will have a free giveaway poster and the first issue will have a pack of Streetfighter II stickers and sticker album offer.

MINDBENDERS

Simon Davies, author of the slow-running "bi-monthly" The Last Planet, tells us that the third issue is to be "published imminently". I should point out that the interview with Dave Sim and Gerhard co-written by Mark Simpson was not by Steve Holland of CW but by Steve Holland of Fantastic Store.

COMICS UNLIMITED

Comics Unlimited in Bedford will be having a Charity Day on 27 August to raise money for the local Bedford Housing Link. On the day there will be various events, including a charity auction, a raffle, demonstration games and some sort of tv memorabilia display.

COMPAL

Comic Book Postal Auctions have announced a couple of highlights for their September catalogue, including, from the Golden Age, Batman #19 (1943), Batman #34 (1946), Star Spangled Banner #16 (1943); amongst other items up for grabs is an Incredible Hulk #6, Daredevil #1, Spider-Man #147-150 (the 'clone' issues), Iron Fist #14 (1st Sabretooth) and a rare Beano Annual from 1940. The catalogue is free and can be obtained by phoning 071 586 3007.

UKCAC

We're on the run-up to the annual United Kingdom Comic Book Convention, variously pronounced "Uck-ack" or "You-cak" depending on who you talk to. Whatever you decide on, it's the tenth of its kind

LONDON CARTOON CENTRE

An Open Letter to the Comic Industry from David Lloyd

The London Cartoon Centre, which I've been proud to be connected with for nine years, is currently celebrating it's tenth anniversary in the midst of it's biggest funding crisis yet. If you care about the medium we all work with, I beg you to read the appeal below from Eve Stickler, the Centre Manager:

The London Cartoon Centre - the only charity-run school in Britain teaching the art and business of cartoons and comics - has been begging for funds for the last two years to prevent closure. Despite this we're still around, but at the time of writing there is the very real worry that this time we may not escape the Grim Reaper.

Raising hard cash to carry on the work of the Centre is becoming nightmarishly difficult. There are now hundreds of art organisations struggling in this time of rate-capping and grant cuts. As a result, all those of us who have lost local authority support are grappling for the same small amount of charitable funding in the central pot. Many of these organisations are more widely recognised as 'worthy' than ourselves and so we have to face the same battle each year, explaining the artistic, creative and social merits of our chosen art form to potential funders.

The LCC needs a minimum of £30,000 a year in order to function on a shoe string as it does at present. £30,000 pays the rent, basic administrative expenses, the tutors fees, electricity, water, paper, materials, the photocopier, the phone et al. for 12 months. But only a fraction of this can be raised directly from students. We've tried to make the Centre run on a commercial basis by piloting courses that charge a fee per student to cover the entire cost, but almost all of our students are on low income or unemployed. We've had no choice but to abandon high charge classes, and fundraise instead.

On average, for ever 6 funding applications we make we receive 5 rejections and a possible acknowledgement. Occasionally this turns into hard cash, but only after meetings and negotiations which can last a year. Some funders just ignore our applications completely, but as with the London Arts Board (who have never responded) we nevertheless continue to apply.

However, on the positive front, we do have some sponsors for this year who have managed to keep the place alive. They are: Virgin Communications, Titan Distributors, and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation. We hope that they will continue this crucial support in 1995 but nothing's certain. Meanwhile applications are presently with The Arts Council, London Arts Board, The Economist Company Charity, The Foundation for Sports and the Arts, Marks & Spencers, the European Social Fund and the Swedish Arts Council.

The London Cartoon Centre is busier than it's sever been. We have run successful projects with the Tate Gallery and London Weekend Television. Ex-students now count Marvel, DC, Fleetway and Dark Horse among their employers. It would be terribly tragic if, on reaching our tenth anniversary, we were simply allowed to die.

Since the above was written, word has come in that there are now only sufficient funds to keep the Centre open until Christmas. No new funding has materialised. Consequently, the tenth year of the Centre's existence may be it's last. Unless you would like to see this happen, unless you would like to see a school of excellence cease to exist, help us, please.

Write to Neil Johnston or David Lloyd at: The London Cartoon Centre, 14 Conlan Street, London W10 5AR, or call 081 969 4562.

and promises to be the largest yet staged. The following guests have been confirmed:-

From the UK: Dan Abnett, Charlie Adlard, Brian Bolland, John Bolton, Mark Buckingham, Mike Collins, Alan Davis, Nigel Dobbyn, Garth Ennis, Glenn Fabry, Mark Farmer, Duncan Fegredo, Gary Frank, Phil Gascoine, Dave Gibbons, Alan Grant, Stuart Green, Paul Grist, John Higgins, Peter Hogan, Kev Hopgood, Tony Luke, John McCrea, Robbie Morrison, Kev O'Neill, Woodrow Phoenix, Sean Phillips, Steve Pugh, Frank Quitely, Arthur Ranson, Gordon Rennie, Siku, Will Simpson, Ron Smith, Lew Stringer, Bryan Talbot, Andrew Wildman, Anthony Williams, Steve Yeowell.

From the USA: Denys Cowan, Denny O'Neil, Kurt Busiek, Roberta Gregory, James Robinson, Scott McCloud and this years special Guest of Honour, John Buscema.

If your favourite artist or writer isn't in the above list, don't panic - most British creators find themselves drawn to UKCAC like a magnet with only death or bondage keeping them away.

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Admission prices have been held down for advance booking for the sixth year in a row at only £15.00 for the whole weekend, plus a copy of the convention booklet. For a single day, advance booking price is £10.00. Your application must arrive by Monday, September 12th, and you must enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope because if you don't your application won't be processed. If you are enclosing a cheque with your enquiry, make it payable to Rusty Staples Ltd. You can also enquire about accommodation at the same time, which can be found locally: the average price is around £20 a night, but obviously the cheaper accommodation is going to go first, so ask soon.

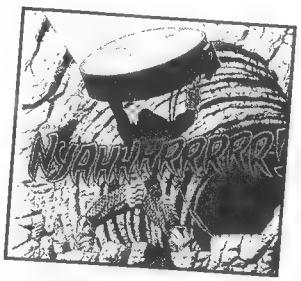
Events are always wide and varied, from panels and exhibits, signings and previews; there's the annual costume parade on Saturday afternoon, the auction of artwork from the convention booklet drawn by some of the top creators in the industry, and this year the proceeds go to the Jack Kirby Educational Fund - this year's artwork is themed around Jack Kirby creations.

DC NEWS

BATMAN/PREDATOR II: BLOODMATCH

Once before a Predator had been matched in Gotham's dark alleys, and a promise made that the city would never again be made a hunting ground. But now an ambitious young Predator with dreams of glory has chosen to break that vow. Arriving on Earth, the alien renews the hunt, seeking to overthrow the upstart human "champion" and thereby bag the biggest game of all!

The premise of the latest DC/Dark Horse collaboration may be a logical extension of their previous pairing, but it should be big news when the latest 4-part series begins shipping on October 11. Doug Moench, Paul



Gulacy & Terry Austin are the creative team behind the latest hunter/hunted game-play, which is going to be further confused by the Batman's stalking of a Gotham crimelord who has hired two assassins to take out the Dark Knight. Drawn into this tangled web is The Huntress and two Predator enforcers sent to track down the rogue. Whose going to know who're the good guys and who're the bad guys?

ROUND-UP

Neal Pozner, aged 38, died on 21 June after a long battle with AIDS related illnesses. He had been a long-time comic fan, publishing fanzines in the 1970s, and a graduate of Cooper Union. He joined DC in 1981 as the industry's first design director, and as art director worked on Ronin and Camelot 3000. He scripted a 4-issue Aquaman mini-series in 1985 and more recently was editor of Showcase.

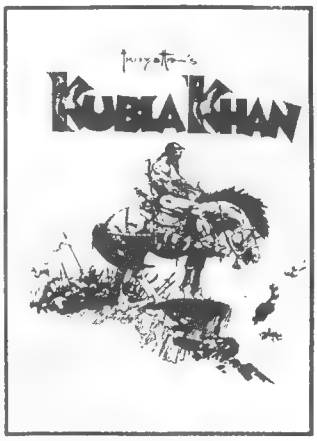
The second ongoing Judge Dredd title debuts from DC on October 25: Judge Dredd: Legends of the Law launches with a story arc penned by John Wagner & Alan Grant, who surely need no introduction, with art by Brent Anderson & Jimmy Palmiotti. 'The Organ Donors' concerns the unfortunate fate of British tourists at the hands of organ-leggers; only the discarded bits start to mutate into something horrible, drawing in everybody's fave Psi-Judge, Cassie Anderson. Dave Dorman will be providing the covers to the 4-issue series.

Batman stars in a prestige format 64-page Elseworlds story which offers a twist on the Frankenstein legend. In Batman: Castle of the Bat, Jack C. Harris and Bo Hampton weave a story around the 18th century slaying of physician Thomas Wayne. His young son discovers a medical research laboratory in a secret vault where Bruce tragically attempts to restore his father using his own research into bat biochemistry, and misguidedly unleashes a Bat-Man which only he can destroy.

Vertigo will be releasing a 15,000 copy hardcover edition of Mr. Punch for sale in the USA to co-incide with the British edition published by Victor Gollancz. There are no plans for any other edition of the book in softcover, which could make it an attraction for Vertigo completists.

Mobfire is described by Vertigo as "The Godfather meets Black Magic", a new 6-part mini-series from writer Gary Ushaw and artist Warren Pleece, who reveal a dark side of London full of arcane ritual, voodoo

Original Art & Prints



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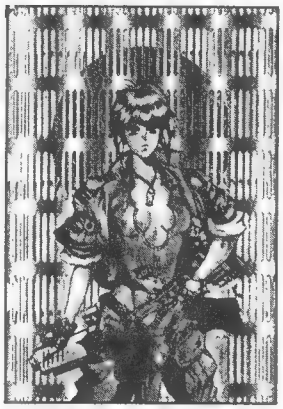

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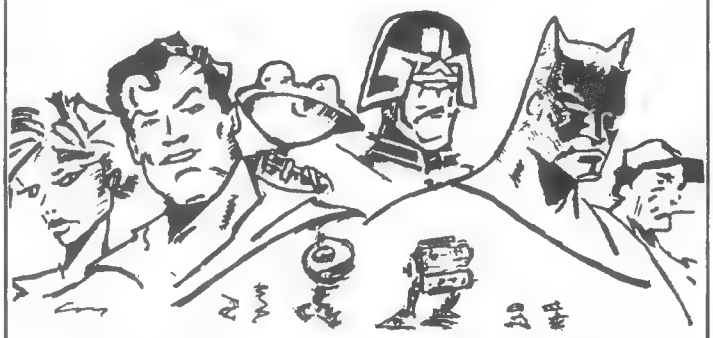

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In Deathwish, the latest Milestone mini-series, readers will be reintroduced to the vengeful character last seen in safely locked up in jail in Hardware. Written by Adam Blaustein with art by J.H. Williams III & Jimmy Palmiotti, the heroine of the series is Marisa Rahm, a "preoperative transsexual" once known to 'her' colleagues as Martin. A series of psychotic murder's in which the killer leaves his victims in cruel mimics of famous works of art leads Rahm to seek Deathwish's help, although her alliance could be a pact with the devil.

DC's Star Trek: The Next Generation and Malibu's Deep Space Nine crossover in a new mini-series, the first issue of which will ship October 4. DC's story involves someone - or something - which has destabilised the wormhole link to Gamma Quadrant, and the Enterprise is assigned to help investigate the vanishing of spaceships that results. The crossover is unique in that there will be two separate series, one two-issue story from DC, the other two-issue story from Malibu. The DC end is handled by Michael Jan Friedman, Gordon Purcell & Terry Pallot.

Still with Trek, October 18 will see the launch of Star Trek: The Next Generation - Lionheart, a new 4-parter by Michael Jan Friedman, Steve Erwin & Charles Barnett, in which Worf undertakes an undercover mission to a Klingon colony threatened by an underground movement, led by Worf's human foster brother.

Sgt Rock Special #2 is a 64-pager with stories by Chuck Dixon chronicling some previously unpublicised exploits from 50 years ago. Eduardo Barreto, Howard Chaykin, Russ Heath and Graham Nolan are the artists and Brian Bolland provides a frontispiece, all wrapped in a Dan Brereton cover...The truth about Damage's true origins are revealed in a new 4-part storyline, 'Fragments', beginning in Damage #5...Justice League International Quarterly #17 is the final 80-page issue...the new Wonder Woman debuts in #92 when Diana's competence is challenged...Green Lantern returns to Earth in #57 and is caught in a psionic grip...his problems and the story continue in New Titans #116...Xombi #7 begins the six-part 'School of Anguish' storyline when Xombi witnesses a murder-for-hire that goes horribly wrong...Tom Peyer joins as writer of Legionnaires #20...Peyer writes R.E.B.E.L.S. which gets a new penciller in Derec Aucoin beginning with #2...a few classics are resuscitated from the vaults in Justice League of America Archives Volume 3, a $49.95 hardcover with an introduction by Roy Thomas...ah, those days of innocence - mind you, there was always the 'Crisis on Earth-One' and 'Crisis on Earth-Two' to contend with, so maybe things haven't changed that much after all...

Jamie Delano returns to Hellblazer for one issue (#84) to tell a tale from John Constantine's past with artist John Watkiss...Eddie Campbell takes over next issue, but he's already off the book...er, that doesn't always happen to people getting the cover-story in CW...Sandman Mystery Theatre #21 begins a new 4-part tale, 'Dr. Death' with layouts by Guy Davis and finished art by Vince Locke...Shade the Changing Man #54 introduces new temporary penciller Mark Buckingham and inker Rick Bryant...and November 29 will see the release of the Vertigo Tarot Deck and Book Set with art and design by Dave McKean, including a full 78-card deck with original McKean art. The accompanying book is written by Rachel Pollack, with an introduction by Neil Gaiman...

MARVEL NEWS

GENERATION X

Scott Lobdell, Chris Bachalo & Mark Buckingham are the creative team behind Marvel's latest X-launch, Generation X, and they start where the whole mutant saga started - at Professor Xavier's School for Gifted Youngsters. The new team

features seven newcomers and one former X-Men hanger-on. Led by the ever patient Banshee and the less-than-compassionate White Queen, the new students are (as described by Marvel):

● Chamber. "Having lost half his chest and most of his face due to the first manifestation of his bio-kinetic blasts, English-bred Jonathan Statsmore is justifiably less than enthusiastic about turning this genetic lemon into lemonade" [it says here]

● M "At first glance, it would seem her mutant power is to be...perfect? Super-strong and fast and able to fly, she occasionally shows flashes of brilliance that make the late Reed Richards seem like a piker. But on second glance, it is obvious there's more to this sixteen-year-old than meets the eye."

● Husk "Since the moment her older brother, Sam (Cannonball) Guthrie left their Kentucky farm to train as a New Mutant, Paige had dreamed of becoming an X-Man herself. Now that she can tear her skin in two, giving way to new powers each time, she's more determined than ever to succeed where she believes her brother failed."

● Mondo "This young Samoan can absorb all manner of organic matter, and would probably be voted most likely to be the team's strongest member - except that he's a happy-go-lucky pacifist who can't conceive of a situation he couldn't handle through compromise. (Of course, he hasn't met Juggernaut yet - has he?)"

● Jubilee "What do you teach a Southern California mall rat and former X-Men hanger on...? You'd be surprised, especially when she turns out to be an eager student dedicated to graduating and becoming a valued member of her favorite team of mutant adventurers."

● Synch "If this St. Louis born young man doesn't have it all - good looks, confidence, charm, confidence, smarts, confi— he can get it with his mutant ability to become bio-genetically in synch with any other mutant. Did we mention confidence?"

● Skin "His mutant ability to control the three-to-six feet of extra skin that makes up his body doesn't seem to leave him ideally suited as a defender of Charles Xavier's dream of peaceful co-existence. But his troubled and violent youth experiences actually find him more determined than most to fight hardest to make that dream a reality."

● Penance "Little is known about the young woman dropped on the campus grounds by the equally mysterious man known only as Gateway. Until she learns how to control the razor sharp edges of her diamond hard skin, she might even prove more of a threat to her fellow students than an entire platoon of Sentinels.

Whereas all the previous rosters of Prof. X's students have registered for their formal education and training sessions at the Xavier Estate in Westchester, N.Y., the eight young men and women who compose the newest freshmen class of future X-Men, find the world's most exclusive prep school has relocated to the Massachusetts Academy campus which until recently housed the Hellfire Club's Hellions. And lest you think the fact that Emma Frost has opened the doors of her school with no strings attached - think again. While she's willing to co-educate these students alongside the Banshee, she's not willing to necessarily let go of the more "aggressive" training techniques she feels are vital in order to prepare Generation X for the world outside the world's walls.

ROUND-UP

The Vision stars in his own 4-issue series, on his own, on the run and facing the spectres of his past! Bob Harras and John Ross (inker To Be Decided) are behind the character many consider the Wolverine of the Avengers. The Prowler also gets a 4-parter at the hands of Carl Potts & Bill Reinhold.

Force Works #5 ships on September 6 with a neon ink cover and a polybagged 16-page insert and acetate print from the Marvel Action Hour cartoons. It doubles the price of the regular edition; the same insert and neon ink can be found on Iron Man #310; and with War Machine #8; the latter two contain a cross-over story. Same insert but no neon ink for Marvel Action Hour which debuts - twice! - on September 20, based on the new Marvel Action Hour cartoons [didn't you just say that? - Steve]. The first debut is Marvel Action Hour featuring Iron Man #1 by Eric Fein, Anthony Williams & John Nyberg in which Iron Man battles Mandarin. Guest stars include Force Works, Hawkeye and War Machine. The second is Marvel Action Hero featuring Fantastic Four #1 by Joey Cavalieri & Quique Alcatena. Doesn't seem to be any guests, but it does seem to be a retelling of the FF's origin.

Plenty more promotion for Iron Man, Force Works and War Machine in the Iron Man/Force Works Collectors Preview, a 48-page special with a wraparound Tom Morgan cover (plus neon ink) featuring details of next month's Iron Man/War Machine/Force Works crossover, 'Hands of the Mandarin' which begins in Force Works #6.

The Spider-Man, Spider-Clone story-line splits Spidey's titles down the middle, with Amazing Spider-Man #395 and Spectacular Spider-Man #218 dealing with the real Peter Parker and Spider-Man #52 and Web of Spider-Man #118 dealing with the Clone, the latter also being the debut of the Clone's new costume. Spider-Man Unlimited #7, which also ships in September, splits its time between the two.

Alan Davis' ClanDestine may be "revered for its superior art and storytelling" according to Marvel's blurb for #2, but not for long as we hear Alan Davis is off the title...Oops! Stop the Press! He's back on it and everyone's denying he was ever off it (where's Brian Glover when you really need him?)...and Hellstorm may be "considered by Marvel staffers as one of our finest", but not for long as it's been cancelled...however, Warren is filling-in on Ghost Rider #55 also available in September, and is currently developing Druid to replace Hellstorm, retaining the same artist - Leonardo Manco - and maybe a Vengeance mini-series...Fantastic Force #1 was resolicited for September release - Greg Wright is no longer to be writing the series, but Tom Brevoort is...The Marvels hardcover has eight never-before-seen pages entitled 'The Making of Marvels' by Alex Ross, and a five-part fold-out painted cover...on a hardcover?...The first of Marvel's 2099 line hits #25 - Spider-Man 2099 will be a 48-page special with a multi-level embossed, foil-stamped cover. Also included is an 8-page Hulk 2099 preview...and since the first four titles were issued a month apart, expect more 2099 anniversaries over the coming months; already Marvel are predicting a surprise preview to be included with Doom 2099 #25 which will debut a new 2099 character: "This one is going to surprise everyone when it comes out!" say Marvel...

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SMOKE DAMAGE

I decided to leave this topic alone for a little while, until the buzz and fire faded out of it, because there are thousands of dangerous fanatics out there who would happily declare some kind of fatwa against me for what I'm about to say. Hopefully, by now, their brain chemicals will have settled into something resembling equilibrium, and I won't be risking my life. Jack Kirby was shit.

There. That got your attention, didn't it? I'm sorry, but all this weeping and gnashing of teeth over the poor dead guy is starting to uncomfortably remind me of the posthumous rehabilitation of Nixon. I don't want to compare Kirby to Nixon, because Nixon was an utter monster, an evil dogf*cker with all the ethics of an eel, a moral mutant who should have been burned and publicly shat upon...and Jack Kirby was a comics artist. See? No comparison. But this slew of crushed little eulogies and rending of garments is really starting to wind me up.

Jack Kirby, to me, is the man who created *Devil Dinosaur*

People keep telling me that without Jack Kirby, we wouldn't have a comics industry today, that, in fact, I wouldn't have a job. Does this mean we wouldn't have 600 new superhero comics a month? Does this mean that the medium would've taken a different turn, that the trailblazing into new outlets performed by Will Eisner would've become the norm? That Gil Kane's early strikes into bookshop friendly formats might have been more of a success? That, perhaps, the newspaper strip side of the medium would cross over more successfully into the comicbook side (the ramifications of which are monstrous Q can you imagine comicbooks of the quality of Doonesbury? A spread of narrative genres of that kind available regularly in your comics shop?)?

Jack Kirby? Didn't he do *Machine Man*?

Yeah, yeah, corpsekicking is small fun, and maybe I shouldn't be indulging in it. Maybe I should be doing more praising and less burying. It's not terribly dignified, is it? Apparently, Kirby was a lovely man, and his Educational Fund sounds like a good idea, provided it's properly handled and not Americocentric. I'd be happier about Frank Plowright sending the UKCAC Auction profits to them if it wasn't organised by a Jewish Temple, for I have a barely-rational loathing for all forms of organised religion. I'd rather see the money go to medical research. But, still, at least it's not going to the LCC this year.

Jack Kirby did *New Gods*, which, I am reliably informed, is a classic of some kind. It is absolutely not a lengthy chunk of clumsy, childish fiction of dubious literacy.

What Jack Kirby did, in the '60's, was to introduce a raw-boned American dynamism into superhero comics. Under Kirby, superhero comics truly moved for the first time It involved heavy stylisation, a massive codification of the human form, but it worked. I'm not going to underplay the importance of Kirby's innovation Q someone with more time on their hands than I, could probably make a good case for its equivalence in the full electrification of rock music, or the establishment of Method acting as the truest representation of personality in cinema. But, you know, Kirby wasn't Orson Welles or anything. Even that fat old bastard's sherry commercials had an undeniable air of quality to them, which isn't something you could accuse *Captain Victory* of.

It's probably worse for me than it is for all of you, because I get sent one copy of every single Marvel book. They arrive weekly, in fat packages wrapped in plastic. And, for the past month, every single one has had a page filled with old guys bemoaning the loss of Kirby. Most of them seem to be people who inked him regularly. I don't know what this says. So maybe it's just the lack of reality infecting these pages that's getting to me. Anyone would think that these people were old Japanese courtiers grieving the loss of a God-Emperor.

Listen, my first memory of comics is of Frank Bellamy and his peers working their fine craft in *TV Action/TV 21*. Bellamy was dead before I was old enough to notice. Kirby's pages in Marvel UK black-and-white reprints of *The Avengers* compared poorly to Bellamy et al. By the mid-to-late Seventies, Arthur Ranson's deeply spooky 'Sapphire & Steel', and Martin Asbury's utterly drug-soaked 'Six Million Dollar Man', both in *Look-In*, held more interest for me than *Thor, Hulk* or *Devil* bloody *Dinosaur*. Kirby came up with one fine innovation, but he was arguably all played out by the early Seventies. Please, mourn Mr. Kirby. The loss of any creative intellect is sad. But don't deify him. The medium desperately needs to move beyond that single innovation, and the concept of another generation browbeaten by tear-soaked eulogies into feeling beholden to Kirby terrifies me.

Shockingly few superhero comics have attempted to move past this. Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' *Watchmen* is the first that occurs to me, a fine work of structuralism (though I find Gibbons' early Ditkoisms irritating) that is also, unfortunately, a dead end. Structuralism, as well as being hellishly difficult, is a one-trick pony. The reaction to the post-*Watchmen* release of Moore and Brian Bolland's *Killing Joke* is testament. As a lesser work, conducted in a smaller space, the joins are more visible. Note that, post-*Watchmen*, other people stole only the superficial aspects of the book (the gridwork, overlaps etc.).

It was only a handful of years later that Moore and his collaborators found themselves pastiching Kirby in 1963, partly to make a little money.

If I still have your attention after that first crass wake-up call, then, please, don't let Jack Kirby's ghost become some miasmic, poisoned apparition hanging over superhero comics. As the pre-eminent genre within the medium, it falls to us to keep it evolving, as well as to establish legitimacy for other narrative genres. Jack Kirby was a '60's thing, and today we need him about as badly as we need Helen Shapiro.

Next month; something less pissed off.

***WARREN ELLIS** works for Marvel, DC, Epic and Vertigo, writing a couple of graphic novels on the side, and is generally trying his best. He is also donating the fee for this column to the Jack Kirby Educational Fund.*

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From X-files to X-Men, Mighty Morphin Power Rangers, Ren & Stimpy, Green Hornet, Highlander, Dr Who, Blakes Seven, the list goes on and on and on and on (to paraphrase the Ariston AD). The fourth Astra Satellite, "D" is due for launching soon, rumoured to be among the transponder renters is the Sci Fi channel of the USA. Not since MTV has a cable channel managed to sign up viewers faster, Sci Fi is one of the most popular US cable companies with 24 hours a day wall to wall programming.

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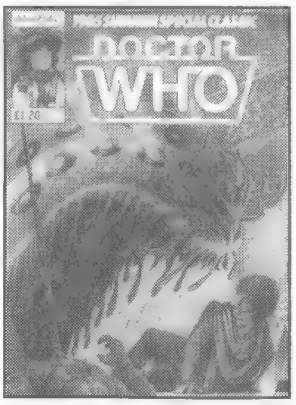

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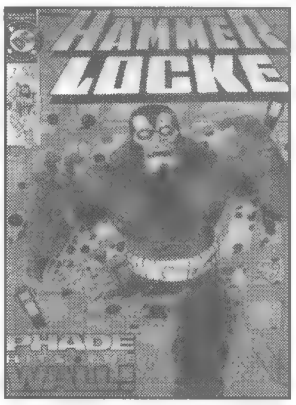

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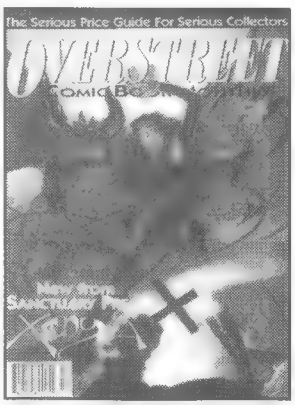

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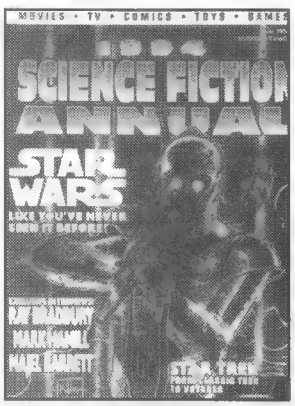

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There's been a lot of talk in publications recently, from both readers and retailers, about how the levels of quality in comics seem to have plummeted; about how the good writers and good artists don't seem to be teaming up to produce good comics about good characters; about how everything's become lowest-common-denominator comics. It strikes me that the people who are saying this are making the common mistake of assuming that quality and popularity are linked. You only need to look at something like music charts or this month's best-selling paperbacks to realise that it doesn't work like that. I don't mean to burst anyone's bubble, but Take That are not the next Beatles, and Jackie Collins really is not superb literature.

This doesn't mean that there isn't any quality material about. Look no further than Alan Moore, Grant Morrison, Neil Gaiman or John Smith to see good characters and stories. But, yes – I know – they're not doing the characters we really care about. They're not behind Wolverine or Batman or a revival of Powerman & Iron Fist. I dunno, it's probably a good thing they're not. I mean, can you imagine? John Smith on X-men? "This issue, Wolverine inherits a demonic portal from his half-seahorse sister which insists on weeping the unpurified blood of the next World War". Neil Gaiman on Batman? "Bruce Wayne consults his rune stones while the Joker vomits Asgardian bile on an unsuspecting Gotham City." It's probably be a lot of fun, but it wouldn't be the same.

So, to me the question isn't "Where are all the quality comics?" I know the answer to that. Somewhere in the lower reaches of the Top 200, just where they should be.

No, the question I'd like answered is "Just where the heck is the British comics industry in all this?" The four creators I mentioned are all British. It was a deliberate choice on my part to illustrate the argument, but I do feel that, if asked to name the twenty great comics creators currently producing material, a good 14 or 15 of them would be British writers and artists. Yet the British comics industry, such as it is, consists of two publishers (there are a lot more, I know, but neither the Beano nor Deadline are deliberately targetted at the hard-core comic reader per se). Marvel UK made a valiant effort a couple of years back but various editorial decisions, not the least of which included a policy of using "the same old faces" (the term "You're only as good as your last job" appeared not to hold much water at M.U.K.), meant the company pretty much imploded under its own weight. Fleetway is certainly in better shape – but even 2000AD, that bastion of UK talent, seems to have lost a lot of its bite recently (can anyone truly justify the most recent Rogue Trooper "story" (in inverted commas, you'll note)?) while the Megazine drifts between genius (Anderson Psi) and the truly unforgivable (Calhab justice, anyone?). It strikes me as odd that there's such apathy to involving the talented British creators on British publications. Just imagine – intelligent writing, powerful emotive storytelling, absorbing characters and a dozen or so British produced titles a month ... Slightly Dizzy Comics, perhaps?

Let me lay my cards on the table here. I'm a published writer and I'm currently involved in the setting up of a new monthly comic (Suicide) from a new British publisher (Quantum Graphics). Besides writing the comic I've also been involved in the business side of the comic's production – calling up retailers to generate interest, among other things. With Suicide we tried to create a utopian package – a strong storyline (in the superhero tradition but not a tradional superhero) with solid comic book artwork. Popular opinion so far (from friends, associates and even a few comic industry professionals) is that we've succeeded. But a lot of retailers (and I'll publicly thank them here for their honesty) reacted with "if it hasn't got a Marvel logo in the corner I don't want to stock it because it won't sell."

Which brings me back to this suggestion that quality levels in comics have plummeted. Now I'd be setting myself up for a fall if I were to suggest Suicide is a "quality" product. Maybe it is, maybe it isn't. I'm in no position to say. But what I can say is, if our experience is anything like that of other would-be publishers, one of the reasons there don't seem to be excellent comics about might be because no-one really wants to look for them. Retailers don't want to chance stocking them in case the next 'George Lucas' begins by producing a Howard the Duck rather than a Star Wars. Readers don't want to chance them in case they get a Batman: Year Three instead of a Batman: Year One. Makes your head spin, doesn't it?

If you do want to try Suicide, issue one is released around August 15th and, if your comic shop doesn't stock it, a cheque or postal order for £1.50 made payable to Quantum Graphics at 84 Brackenfield Road, Great Barr, Birmingham B44 9BH will secure you a postage free copy. If you care to debate what I've said here further, mail to the Quantum address will be forwarded to me by Suicide's publisher.

Thanks for your time. I really hadn't intended for this to end up sounding like a cheap plug!

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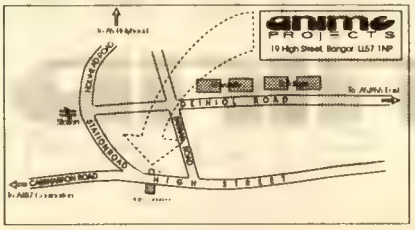

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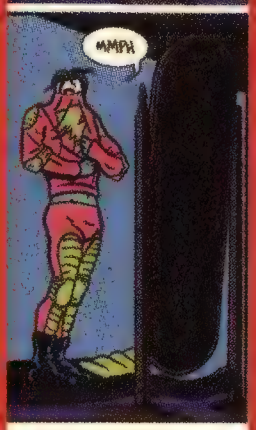

Death may be your Santa Claus

MICHAEL ALLRED ANSWERS QUESTIONS FROM PAUL H. BIRCH

Who is Michael Allred? Why he's creator, writer and artist of the dead-funkiest character in comics, now arriving as a bi-monthly fixture under the bannerhead of the Dark Horse published Madman Comics. However, he was also M. Dalton Allred for such weighty black and white parables as the Dead Air graphic novel, and Graphique Musique-cum-Grafix Muzik series published by Slave Labor and Caliber Press. "I wanted something to get me noticed by name recognition," he says of such times, noting along the way that there's an awful lot of Mikes in the industry. "Dalton's derived from Dale, which is my father's name, and in the States there are B. Dalton book stores, so it carried with it a certain literary pretentiousness, but I was never really comfortable with it. Then finally I felt comfortable enough about my work being recognised that I wasn't worried about simple name recognition, so I changed back." Laughing, he announces: "I'm Mike!"

Me, I'll never bank a cheque without my H firmly affixed, too many bleeding family ghosts to exorcise otherwise. But it does bring us around to the subject of death, or rather a life after death, something which has always permeated this man's work. Mike Allred: are you religious?

"If you call being religious believing in something like a higher spirit, then yes. But at the same time, I have a horrible fear of both death and life. I'm afraid of death because

I'm enjoying my life so much, yet the thought of living forever terrifies me as well, especially an eternal life without conflict because it seems to me it would be so tedious and

tortuous to be trapped in this never-ending existence. And when I contemplate that it gets to a point where if I don't stop thinking about it, I start to drive myself quite mad. It's

Catch-22 for me."

He shares his search for greater awareness, or gnosis, via his Madman, one Frank Einstein, despite claiming it's not a complete alter-ego for himself.

"I see him as an everyman character. I think we're all thrust into existence and left to wonder what it's all about: whether if being good to other people is what's most important about going through life, or just existing for the sake of getting all you can out of it no matter who you step on or hurt. There are so many elements in life which intrigue all of us, but then also, there's the sort of people who just trudge throughout life without ever being aware of themselves or the things they have; just being able to breathe and look at things, and touch people. I find that sad.

"Frank is a character who is thrust into life without memory but with full consciousness and he absorbs everything with complete love and fascination. He truly appreciates everything around him. He's a very good person, even though without a basis in morality there are times when he reacts to situations spontaneously and get into trouble that way, so he can have a violent nature at times. I see that in all of us, and I think that's one of the reasons why so many people can relate to him, if that's truly what's happening. So that's the philosophical level, that's what I want people to, at least, sense if not see on the surface.

"But of course he's also set in this pop culture environment. His world is populated by scientists, aliens and monsters, and G-men and robots so there's a lot of things I can play with. In Madman Adventures #1 (published by Tundra/Kitchen Sink) I put him in a time travel story, just to establish that he had access to it.

"I also established the non-establishment of the costume: even though the mask has stayed the same once the hair came out it has become a second skin. The stitches aren't as present anymore, and are now on the top and bottom so that his mouth is very mobile and expressive, and I'm sure that there will be more subtle changes. I kind of think that by the end of the series it will have a completely different look than what it did at the beginning - it already does! but even different from what it looks like now, just because I enjoy growing and progressing so much. If you look at the run of Fantastic Four with Jack Kirby for instance, and look at the early issues done with artwork by Jack and Dick Ayers, then you the last ones by Jack and Joe Sinnott they're completely different, almost unrecogniseable, but when you go through the issues chronologically, or if you enjoyed them in their original run, you didn't notice it. The changes were that subtle. Life is like that, you don't notice how you change. When we hit puberty in our teen years those are the most drastic years in our life, but everything seems subtle and slow, then later when you look back at old photo albums it makes you realise what was going on in your life and that you are now a completely different person from what you were. I guess that's what I want the series to represent in my life: these series of milestones that will be reflected in the character Frank Einstein."

One such observation an elderly Mike Allred may make will be how he became part of that supposedly closed shop of an imprint, Legend. The current time continuum version of the creator doesn't strike me as someone who'd

smash down doors to get in.

"It was pretty incredible," he relates. "You look at all these guys and it's stunning what they've achieved. They've all been in the comic book industry for at least ten years, and I still feel like the new punk who's just stepped in. I never thought I was anywhere near their level. I did think Wow! Wouldn't it be great to be lumped in with all those guys!?" Developing friendships with them was one thing, wish-fulfilment seemed no more than that.

"I met Frank Miller at a Dark Horse convention and he seemed to be as excited about meeting me as I was him. That was very encouraging and exciting, and we continued that relationship over the phone. He wanted to do the back cover for Madman Comics #1, which was great, and every time we talked we talked about different things that we liked like pulp books, comics and their creators, and toys. And one time he called telling me he had discussed it with the other guys and they had unanimously decided that they would like me to join. I had heard rumours that Art Adams was

Madman © Michael D. Allred

I'M JUST...
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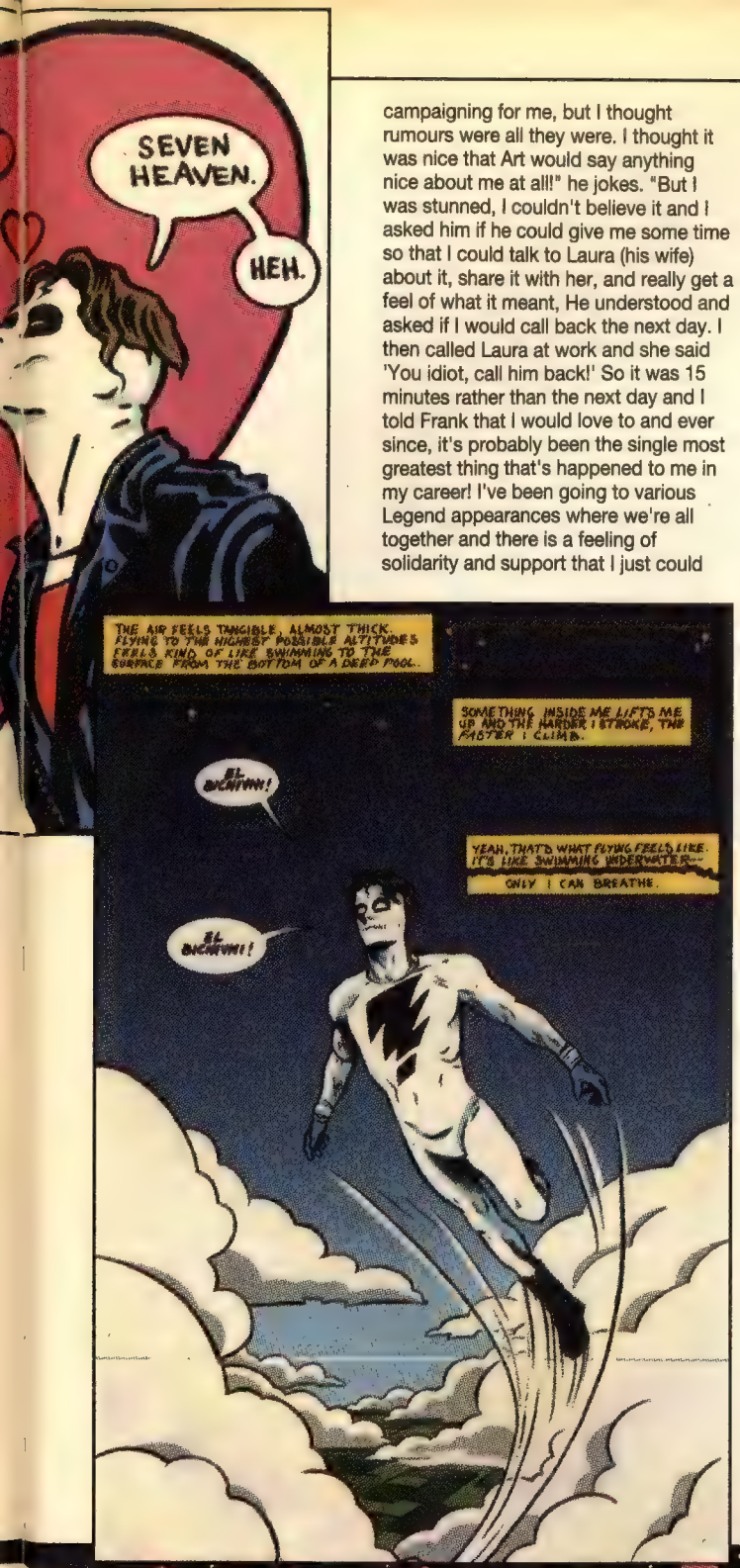
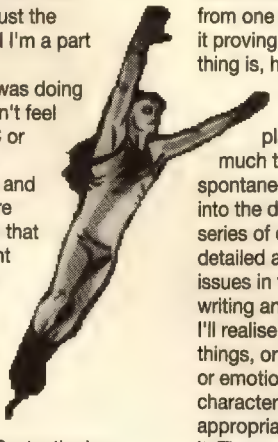

SEVEN HEAVEN.
HEH.
THE AIR FEELS TANGIBLE, ALMOST THICK. FLYING TO THE HIGHEST POSSIBLE ALTITUDES FEELS KIND OF LIKE SWIMMING TO THE SURFACE FROM THE BOTTOM OF A DEEP POOL.
SOMETHING INSIDE ME LIFTS ME UP AND THE HARDER I STROKE, THE FASTER I CLIMB.
EL BUCHWH!
YEAH, THAT'D WHAT FLYING FEELS LIKE. IT'S LIKE SWIMMING UNDERWATER— ONLY I CAN BREATHE.
EL BUCHWH!

campaigning for me, but I thought rumours were all they were. I thought it was nice that Art would say anything nice about me at all!" he jokes. "But I was stunned, I couldn't believe it and I asked him if he could give me some time so that I could talk to Laura (his wife) about it, share it with her, and really get a feel of what it meant, He understood and asked if I would call back the next day. I then called Laura at work and she said 'You idiot, call him back!' So it was 15 minutes rather than the next day and I told Frank that I would love to and ever since, it's probably been the single most greatest thing that's happened to me in my career! I've been going to various Legend appearances where we're all together and there is a feeling of solidarity and support that I just could not have imagined, it's so wonderful to be lumped in with these guys, especially at this point in their careers because they're all doing what they want to do: writing their own work, creating their own characters and owning their own characters, and this is just the beginning for them, and I'm a part of it.



"It's kind of odd, I was doing it out of necessity, I didn't feel that I had a place at DC or Marvel playing with old established characters, and now all of these guys are doing the kind of things that they really love and want to." He gives numerous lengthy examples of hows and whys on behalf of each member of this gang he's joined, but one tends to stand out: "I've seen The Big Guy and Rusty, the boy Robot, this is the comic book, it's incredible! This is Geoff Darrow's attempt at an all ages comic, and I stress the word attempt," he laughs before adding, "His next project is something I am thrilled beyond words about but not allowed to talk about even." Kinda makes you curious don't it'

"But it's truly the work these guys are doing I'm most looking forward to and most enjoying. Other than that the work I most enjoy is what I have since I first got into comics: Love and Rockets really made me want to get up there and do it myself; seeing what Dan Clowes has done with Eiqhtball; Peter Bagge in all of his work; Jim Woodring, I think is an amazing talent. It's so few and far between to see somebody break out and do work which is just so vital that you know the artist is bursting and that they would do it under any circumstance. That is one of the things that feeds me from being in Legend, because I get to be associated with being with these guys." Although I'm sure most of Legend are currently happy as hell and doing work they're proud of, I suspect time and circumstances have more than played their part in getting them to this stage, and were it all to fall apart tomorrow they'd still be able to take on work they wouldn't turn their nose up at.

What will always remain the dumbest, and most asked, question in comics is: where do you get your ideas? While I'm not about to lower myself quite that far, my mind does do the odd somersault when I'm leafing through an issue of Madman as to how Allred shifts from one major event to another without it proving too scatological. The strange thing is, he claims the details are chronologically set out!

"I have an overall game plan that I stick to, but not so much that it stops from being spontaneous when it comes to going into the details of each issue. It's a series of outlines that become more detailed as I focus down to the five issues in front of me, but even after writing an issue and when I'm drawing it I'll realise there are better ways of doing things, or that there's some expression or emotion that needs to come from a character that would be more appropriate than how I'd originally seen it. The way I write allows me to be spontaneous at every corner, but there is an established track. I'm almost nailed down on #6, and very much on #7 which is a turning point.

"Snap City is the centre of Frank's universe - and speaking of the universe, he will explore it! - so we'll see him in outer space and visiting other planets. Even though there are strong elements of science fiction there are also going to be some very down to earth issues, and there will be as many romance stories as there are stories about his friendships with aliens. There'll be every kind of genre thrown in there. And I haven't really said this is earth that he's on anyway, so Snap City might not even be on earth!"

His outer space experiences will no doubt arise due to a character who initially appeared to be a villain, but was simply an alien who didn't want a shotgun wedding. We're talking Mott. The name being a tip of the hat to the '70s hit band, who took their name from the novel Mott The Hoople.

"They are still one of my favourite groups and I still listen to their music all the time." he enthuses, continuing, "It's not only my way, of saying 'Hey, all you people who like Mott the Hoople I thought they were a great band too'', it also provides immediate affection for the character too, because instantly love the character because I love the group." The individual affect of the Hoople's influence was, probably, that Allred joined a radio station that took him to Europe, and I bought myself a Gibson Thunderbird, but never could carry off those thigh high boots the way Overend Watts did. Sad world some us live in isn't it!

Nonetheless, Mott and Madman are going to be great chums their creator exclaims,

prior to adding, "At least that's the direction of the relationship now. These are the little details that I haven't decided on, and may change, and that's what is exciting for me. They may have a falling out. But currently their relationship is growing, and they're becoming very close."

Someone Madman's close to, professionally at least, but has the classic hallmarks over a baddie in the old tradition is

"He has that very villainous profile, and there are certain motivations of his that are focussed more on his research than the people around him. Bonnie, for instance, I don't mind telling you is probably the most intelligent person in the whole series, but right now she is only seen as a very buxom blond bombshell, she has a crush on Dr. Flem and he doesn't really see it! The things that concern him most are his research, and his study of life and what it means, so sometimes relationships do get in the way, but whether or not he will become a villain, I will just have to tell you to wait and see."

I'd heard it said Frank and Joe (a female by the way) were fictional surrogates for Michael and his spouse Laura.

"Laura is my ideal, and Joe would be Frank's ideal. Originally I didn't see Joe as Laura at all, and I never related to Frank Einstein either, but the further I go along, the more I put into it the more I do identify with Frank, and the more he becomes me. Or at least there are elements of me in him, and the same with Joe and Laura."

IT'S SAD THAT THERE AREN'T COMICS THAT CHILDREN CAN'T ENJOY AS MUCH AS ADULTS AND VICE VERSA

Breaking out into laughter he continues, "But so far, they're just comic book characters!"

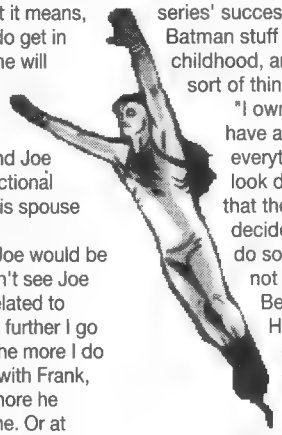
His intention with Madman Comics is to develop an all-ages welcome title.

"It's sad that there aren't comics that children can't enjoy as much as adults and vice versa. I'm a big fan of Carl Barks, I see how his work spans the age group, and I want to do something like that. My very good friend Jeff Smith is having that kind of success, although on the surface Bone looks like a children's book so far it's adults who are his largest audience but I'm very excited about his work and success. I just think that it's a very exciting time to be in comic books right now."

Especially, if you've a property you own and are in a position to reap the additional merchandising benefits. It's something Allred has been wise to, almost, from day one, if only through necessity.

"Dead Air was the first thing I did, and I didn't have a clue what I was doing. I was basically trying to turn what was a screenplay into a comic book, because I had aspirations to be a screen writer while I was a TV reporter. And when I was living in Europe I did three issues of Graphique Musique, the title inspired by these two shops I saw in Paris so when we decided to move back to the States and really make a stab at a comic book career, we made ends meet by selling T-shirts we'd made ourselves. Even though people might not have known what Graphique Musique was, at least they liked what the T-shirts looked like!

"With Madman we were able to do flippy-flyers, finger puppets, post cards, balsa wood gliders, cloissone pins and things like that. Having the toys, which are enjoyable, to go along with the comic book, makes the comic book just that much more fun." He draws similarities with the Batman goodies that proliferated due to the '60s TV series' success, "Having all that Batman stuff was the centre of my childhood, and I want to do the same sort of thing.



"I own everything outright and have a complete say in everything. I do have a first look deal with Dark Horse so that they have 10 days to decide whether they want to do something or not, and if not I can take it elsewhere. Before I went to Dark Horse, Kelley Jones said I ought to do a metal embossed lunch box, and I thought that was a great idea, Tundra went for it, as did Kitchen Sink when they took over." Expect it Xmas. "So far Dark Horse have wanted to do everything else. We've done a life-size door poster out for September; Randy Bowens and I have done a Madman figurine for early next year; and what has been the most exciting for me, a boxed card set with 50 of my favourite artists which is just stunning! They're all very different, you can immediately identify the work."

"They treated me great, and did a lot for my career." he says of working for DC, "I really enjoyed that. They allowed me to do The Geek with Rachel Pollack; Shade, the Changing Man with Peter Milligan, one of my favourite writers who works with one of my favourite artists, Brendan McCarthy; and Neil Gaiman, which I would have to say is probably my most successful collaboration, with the Prez story in Sandman.

"I really liked doing that, I love how Neil writes the scripts like letters, very personal, it's a great way to collaborate, and he tells me the reaction to that issue was quite positive, the mail tripled. He wrote a great story and I was happy to be part of it.

"I did a one-shot at Epic with Bernie Mirault called Everyman which I still have a lot of affection for. I'm a big fan of Bernie's work and The Jam, is a wonderful character and deserves far more success than it has." He also got to work with veteran artist Murphy Anderson thanks to Jim Valentino. "Jim has been very supportive of my work and he thought it would be fun if he did a retro Superman-style character. It was basically a 12 page lark which showed up in Shadowhawk. We all had breakfast together at San Diego last year. Jim introduced Murphy and me to each other as the two deepest voices in comics," he laughs."It was thrilling to meet the man, and I wanted to be a part of his career. The twist on it was that I inked him rather than him inking me as he's probably best known as an inker although he's a dominant penciller." The character, U.S. Male, also featured in a Shadowhawk card set. "A lot of people got the impression that it was going to be a regular series for Image but it was never more than what has already been seen, it was just something that looked like it would be fun, and an opportunity to work with Murphy and Jim."

But that's the past, albeit a recent one. Now his sights are fixed towards Madman Comics.

"I am doing what I enjoy. There's really nothing to sway me from it now and if I can do as well financially with my own work, and have complete control over it," laughing, "Why would I want to do anything else?

"The best thing that has resulted from the success of Image is that the buying habits have been changed, people are now looking for work apart from the big two, and when they see the love that goes into creator-owned work, because there's no reason to hold back, I think that's where the future's headed. I think more creator-owned books are going to be successful, and more quality is going to come into it. I think more cartoonists are going to come into it, I guess storytellers is the word we should be using. I'm talking about people like Jack Cole, Will Eisner, or Harvey Kurtzman. I want to be just as strong an artist as I am a writer: I want to tell great stories that are going to entertain people and make them think. And that's what I see happening so much more now, and the future looks bright. It just takes people who love comic books to support that kind of work, and if that happens there's no limit to the kind of work that we're going to see in the decades to come." It sounds just a tad too optimistic view to me. "Well, hopefully I won't have these words kicked down my throat'" he replies. Me neither, but I'm left with the lines of a Mott the Hoople number going through my bonce, 'Violence, it's the only the thing that'll make you see reason, that'll make you see sense.' Time will tell, eh? CW

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Bizarr

HO HO! NICE ONE, DAVE!
NOW THE LITTLE WAGGER LOOKS JUST LIKE HIS DAD!
AHHH.. FUR OFF...
I NEVER TOUCHED THE LYING COW...
GET LOST, CHERYL-ANNE! YOU'RE A FLIPPIN' DOG!
DON'T CRY, BABY! THEM SOFTIES AT SOCIAL SECURITY WILL SEE US ALRIGHT!
YOU SCHEMING SINGLE MUM! HAVEN'T WE PAID ENOUGH FOR YOUR MISTAKES?
2000 AD SAYS -- HANDS OFF THE PUBLIC PURSE, YOU BLOOD-SUCKING PARASITES!
MEANWHILE, JUST UP THE ROAD, AT THE ZOO...
COME ALONG, CHILDREN! WE'VE ALREADY COMPLAINED ABOUT THE LACK OF WHEEL-CHAIR FACILITIES AROUND THE SEAL PIT!
YES, VICAR!
IT'S TIME TO GET BACK ON OUR SPECIAL BUS!
OI, DAVE! DO YOU SEE WHAT I SEE?
TOO RIGHT, MATE!
I THINK WE JUST FOUND OUR TICKET TO THE WORLD CUP!
THERE'S A GOOD LITTLE CHAP!
YOUR LEGS MAY BE USELESS BUT GOD BLESSED YOU WITH A LOVELY SMILE!
PLEASE, VICAR!
DONALD WANT TO PUSH!

re Boy

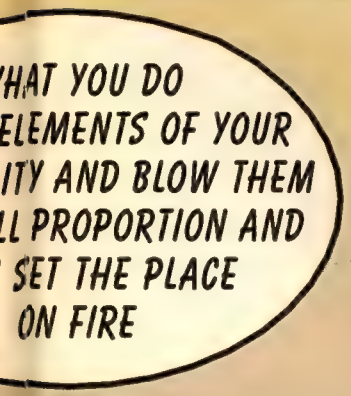
TO GRANT MORRISON, A GOOD COMIC IS LIKE A GOOD POP RECORD: IT CAPTURES THE SHEER NOWNESS OF A MOMENT AND IS THEN BLISSFULLY FORGOTTEN UNTIL IT TURNS UP IN SOME FOUR COLOUR GOLDEN HOUR OF THE FUTURE AND MEMORIES COME FLOODING BACK. MORRISON HAS BEEN LAYING LOW THESE PAST COUPLE OF YEARS BUT NOW HE'S RETURNED TO THE MONTHLY ARENA WITH THE INVISIBLES. STEPHEN JEWELL WITNESSES HIS SECOND COMING...

Despite being a cult favourite, Grant Morrison's *Doom Patrol* was never the critical success or sold as much as he would have wanted; he eventually decided to call it a day and do something different when the time was right. Until then, he bided his time, travelling the world from Katmandu to bungy jumping in New Zealand. Now, he's back with *The Invisibles*, Vertigo's first completely creator owned, on-going monthly.

The *Invisibles* encompasses all of Morrison's interests from the occult to secret societies and conspiracy theories. He's been able to include all the odd ideas which otherwise wouldn't have found a home and there are a lot of references to his past work. Old Morrison characters will appear and there will even be some D.C. characters although he hasn't been allowed to mention them by name. "The whole idea behind it is just the scope of the thing is so wide that I was able to put all that into it. The idea of a secret society that has existed from the dawn of time possibly and will exist until history comes to an end in the year 2020 is an idea that is so wide ranging that basically it can accommodate anything I want to write about." *The Invisibles* has been described as the ultimate conspiracy. "Actually, the ultimate conspiracy won't be revealed until the last issue which is however many years down the line."

Morrison already knows how The Invisibles will end but isn't sure what uncharted territory he will cross before getting there. Like a lot of writers, he knows the beginning and ending of his story but not the bits in between. "That's what I usually feel: as long as you've got a goal to work towards you can take as much time as necessary to get to a goal from the start." He also isn't sure how long the series will run for: "I keep projecting it because I've got so many stories worked out. The more sub plots and characters start to spin off and you want to tell more stories... basically I'm going to run with it until it becomes boring."

So, who are the Invisibles? Anyone could be a member and they might not even know it. According to Morrison, all that is required is involvement in sustained activity against all forces which retard human development and evolution. The main character to start with is young Dane McGowan. "He's kind of the reader identification figure to a certain extent even though I don't expect many of the readers joyride and smash bottles over teacher's heads, though I like to hope so. He's basically there to introduce us to the whole concept of the Invisibles because he's being indoctrinated into the group by the other members of this cell of five people. One of the members of the cell has mysteriously vanished. Obviously that will be explored later but they have to find a replacement and by various methods of Invisibles intelligence, they pinpoint this kid who they think is a rebellious spirit that they



Bizarre Boy

can use and train. "So, we see it from his point of view which is also the point of view of someone who doesn't have the kind of language that I use to describe this stuff so it makes it easier for me to deal with it in a simple way without resorting to over flowery, theatrical language...

"King Mob's the current leader of the cell of five terrorists that we deal with. He's the ultimate product of Invisibles training; he's someone who's been doing it for years and he's learned all kinds of occult and psychic techniques and he can do martial arts and all sorts of things. He's a character who appeared in *Near Myths* which is the first published work that I did so, again, there's a whole background to be explored with him. But when we first meet him he's basically this fantastic assassin who can do anything - but, of course, he's not..."

One Invisible who sounds especially interesting is the transvestite shaman, Lord Fanny. "That character's going to be explored quite intensively early on - the idea of a South American transvestite. He belongs to a long line of witches going back to the Totec era in South America. The power is normally passed down in matralinical descent from mother to daughter but this particular family didn't manage to produce a daughter so they bring the son up as the daughter and he grows up to be this glorious transvestite." The inspiration for Lord Fanny was apparently drawn from a Channel Four programme about Brazilian transvestites although Morrison says that it may just have been an excuse to watch sleazy documentaries.

"Boy is probably the least worked out right now but she's there in the early stuff. She's basically a New York street girl, who decided to join the police force to get out of poverty and discovered all kinds of levels of conspiracy and strange goings-on in the bowels of the police force so to speak; she's a kind of tough talking *Just Another Girl on the I.R.T.* character. Ragged Robin is another occult, witchy character. The original name we had for this character was Raggedy Ann but the lawyers said we couldn't use it because there's a famous American doll, so I just took the name from an old 18th Century term for a young girl in rags. Her whole thing is that she has psychic powers but they're relative to her scepticism so the less she believes in something the more likely it will happen.

"Jack Frost is Dane when he becomes an actual member of the Invisibles - that's the codename that he takes on for various reasons which are explained over the first few issues. Tom O'Bedlam is a kind of old man figure who initiates Dane into a lot of the ideas behind what's going on. He's from an Invisibles cell which operated in the 1920s and we'll be dealing with them in the second year stories so again everything's worked out. It all relates back in time so we'll see him when he's eighteen and a sort of bright young thing of the '20s."

POP CULTURE

Each *Invisibles* sequence will be drawn by a different artist with Jill Thompson following Steve Yeowell on the second cycle. Morrison admires the way that Neil

INVIS

STEVE YEOWELL TALKS TO STEPHEN JEWELL

A couple of UKCACs ago, I was mistakenly asked by a young fan whether I drew Zenith, no doubt because of the similarity between my surname and Mr Yeowell's. In retrospect, I should have lied through my teeth and signed his entire *2000AD* collection, but instead I apologetically told him who I really was. He asked for my autograph anyway. Down the line from Manchester, Steve Yeowell greets this revelation with some amusement.

Yeowell's entire career has been marked by his collaborations with the *enfant terrible*, Grant Morrison. From the heady first days of Zenith to their latest project, the inaugural issues of Morrison's epic *Invisibles*. "What excited me about the project was that I got the same buzz from reading the proposal that Grant had written as I remember getting when I read the proposal for Zenith for the first time. Grant's enthusiasm for the project seems to come over and he just seemed to be buzzing with ideas." However, he wasn't the first choice for *Invisibles*' art chores: "Jill Thompson was originally scheduled to be drawing the first eight issues but it turned out that she was over-committed. D.C. wanted to bring out *The Invisibles* around August, so rather than wait till Jill was free, which would have meant the first issue coming out next year, I stepped in to draw the first four - rather like the situation on Zenith when Brendan (McCarthy) decided that he didn't want to commit himself to

Gaiman has been able to work with different artists on *Sandman* and plans to tailor each story cycle to suit the particular artist's talents. No other artists have yet been lined up, but artists like Bryan Talbot have expressed interest. Brian Bolland is another distinct possibility although Morrison is unsuprisingly not prepared to speculate over when exactly that story would see the light of day. Sean Philips will be supplying all the covers except for the first issue which features a Rian Hughes photo image. Like Zenith and Doom Patrol, Morrison did the original character sketches from which Jill Thompson did the final versions. One character who hasn't changed from Morrison's original design is King Mob which was taken from the latest fetish magazines.

One common theme which seems to be running through all of Morrison's work of late is the role that pop culture, and especially music, play in society. "Music particularly is a really big influence on me and the way I work which is more based on the things I listen to than the things I've read. Also I like the idea of comics being throwaway and I like pop culture because it dates and becomes typecast." Morrison likes to compare a good comic book to a perfect pop song: "Other people obviously don't share that; I know a lot of people want (their work) to be read by students in the year 2050 but somehow I don't believe that's going to happen so I'd rather capture the time, the now, and pin that down and say this is the way we live now." Morrison has visited this territory with Zenith, who changed his image and adopted to new trends with each new series. "The first series of Zenith is so dated! That's exactly the way I wanted it because it reminds me of all the things that were going on then..."

Amongst the many subjects that *Invisibles* explores will be "the godly nature of the Beatles." A particularly eerie scene in the first issue features an ominous conversation between the young John Lennon and Stuart Sutcliffe about dying young. "That was a weird thing because one of the early stories that I did which was never published featured the character that has now become King Mob and it had a whole sequence with Stuart Sutcliffe's ghost in it. He was a character who has always fascinated me because he looked fabulous and died young.

"I'm also interested in magic, as you know, and I was trying to do things which were unusual in the occult sphere. What I did one time was try to summon up John Lennon using magical techniques - I figured he's got all the attributes of a god and he's no longer on the physical plain. He's got certain music that typifies him and his favourite number was nine so you can use all that stuff to try and create the spirit of Lennon and I found after a wee while that it worked. There's two pages in *Invisibles #1* which are completely autobiographical when King Mob summons up John Lennon."

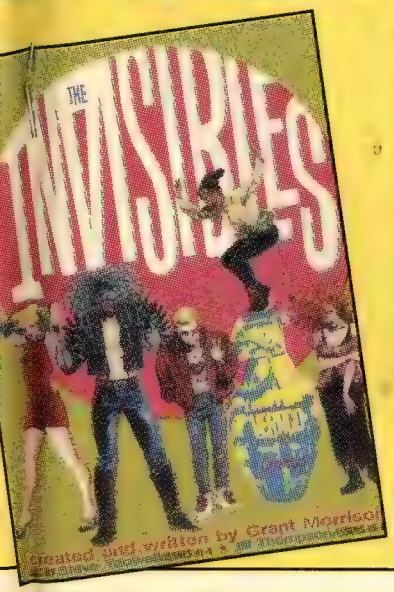
BIZARRE BOYS

Morrison is also writing one and a half of the four Vertigo Voices one shots which are due to come out from Art Young's British office around the end of the year, the half being Bizarre Boys which he will co-write with *Shade* and *Enigma* scribe, Pete Milligan. The idea for Bizarre Boys came about when Morrison, Milligan and Young spotted a porno mag called Bizarre Boys while in Barcelona for its Comic Expo. "It was just in this little stall selling porn mags. Obviously the title leapt off the shelf and we thought we've got to do something called *Bizarre Boys*."

Morrison and Milligan decided to co-write the book: "What we want to do is have a day called Bizarre Boys Day and the process of actually assembling the book will also be documented. The actual story itself will be composed of lots of smaller stories which integrate to form one big story set at various times and places." With Morrison in Glasgow and Milligan in London, each would individually write a bit and then pass it back to the other. "We're basically just writing it then we're going to assemble the thing so there'll probably be more pages than what we need. We had the idea of having it like (William Burroughs') *Naked Lunch*; basically we write as much as we can until we get fed up and choose the best." The artist is Tank Girl's Jamie Hewlett, and Morrison likes what he's seen of Hewlett's sample pages although they apparently have nothing to do with the finished story.

For *Bizarre Boys*, Morrison and Milligan have created the anagramatical author characters, Morrigan and Millison. The actual porn mag, *Bizarre Boys* will appear at the beginning but the scene is quite different as Morrigan and Millison are also in attendance. *Bizarre Boys* will explore the thorny issue of the creative process which has very much been in vogue over the last couple of years. "I kind of did that stuff in *Animal Man*. *Bizarre Boys* is a different take

SIBLE BOY



sixteen weeks of comic strips."

Yeowell is obviously in his element drawing *The Invisibles*. Out of a plethora of quintessentially Morrisonesque characters, I wonder whether there are any that he particularly favours? "I like them all really. They're all really strong. King Mob is especially interesting. He's got a cyberpunk element that I haven't had the opportunity to depict too much. It's also nice to draw Dane, the young Scouse lad. Some young scally with baggy jeans and a Liverpool football shirt." The series is firmly grounded in reality with most of Yeowell's sequence set in Liverpool and partly in London, so has he had to do much location research? "It can be a bit of a problem because people are going to be far more familiar with any specific setting you draw but what I tend to do is cheat a bit and use reference material from one city to stand in for another. For instance, the council estate in Liverpool is actually based on council estates in Manchester. It's far easier for me to do some kind of photo reference nearby; I saw a news item on tv about some area of Liverpool and it looked pretty much as I'd drawn it without actually seeing it."

Yeowell last collaborated with Morrison on the retro-cyberpunk adventures of that fey Victorian dandy, *Sebastian O*. "I tried to draw Sebastian in a style that was influenced by those Aubrey Beardsley illustrations from the turn of the century and I was doing things like only using the blacks as a design element rather than as a means of depicting mass and form, and, on the whole, I think I was pretty successful. It marked the return of Grant writing comic stories that are just romps, where he moved away from the occasionally self indulgent *Doom Patrol* stuff and just did something that was just a mad rush." Yeowell wouldn't say no to more Sebastian and there is apparently another story to be told, but it's just a case of both Morrison and Yeowell finding time in their schedules and having a mind to do it.

Apart from Zenith, *Invisibles* and *Sebastian O*, Yeowell has also worked with Morrison on Doom Patrol and 'The Further Adventures of Hitler', Yeowell putting their long lasting partnership down to the fact that they leave each other alone to do their individual jobs. "I work with Grant and Mark (Millar) because I get on with them and I just get an enormous pleasure reading the scripts. The scripts Grant writes for me tend to be rather more minimal than the scripts he writes for someone else. There's far more trust between us; he's

on that; the whole point is that its funny - its a kind of romp which turns nasty halfway through..." Morrison is keen to point out that although Bizarre Boys is about the creative process, it isn't boring at all and is full of sex and violence, etc.: "We've tried to make it not too overtly post modernist. We decided that the main thing was to get a good story in there and the other stuff is left for the reader to infer..."

Morrison's other Vertigo Voices project is *Kill Your Boyfriend* which is being drawn by Hewlett's Deadline cohort, Philip Bond. *Kill Your Boyfriend* takes the conventions of American road movies and transposes them to a humdrum Northern English setting which culminates in an attempt to blow up Blackpool Tower. Morrison acknowledges that while some British creators like Dave Gibbons may have been raised on American comics, British culture has always been his primary influence. "I think everything I've done is rooted in that: I'd rather have George Formby than Elvis Presley any day." He's disturbed about the way British cultural values have been superseded by the multiplex mentality of Hollywood. "Just about everything I do now is a reaction against Americanisation of British culture. I'm trying to re-introduce all that stuff to the Americans which hopefully to them is going to be exotic, like in *The Invisibles*: I know that in real life, a character like Dane McGowan would give people the finger. I'm trying to re-introduce the two finger gesture."

"I'D RATHER HAVE GEORGE FORMBY THAN ELVIS PRESLEY ANY DAY."

Kill Your Boyfriend revolves around a bookish female, who is entranced by a psychotic delinquent after he kills her boring boyfriend. "Like *St Swithin's Day*, the characters don't have any names. Basically its just a boy and a girl, so the readers can project onto them whatever they want. It's just a scholarly girl who meets up with a bad lad. The whole thing's just a real black comedy in a kind of Joe Orton discipline." Kill Your Boyfriend is inspired by late '60s and early '70s British humour and especially the work of film director, Lindsay Anderson (*If, O Lucky Man*) and playwright Orton (*Loot*, etc. Orton was the subject of Stephen Frears' excellent *Prick Up Your Ears*) "Just that whole period in the '60s and '70s when people were all allowed to break free from what had been really repressive British censorship, when you got some really anarchic pieces of work coming out. I felt that the stuff we're getting now is so diluted that we need a bit of spirit again. That's another thread that's running through the work I'm doing, like *The Invisibles*. *Kill Your Boyfriend* also has this really free-wheeling, anti-establishment feel to it."

MYSTERY PLAYS

Mystery Play, Morrison's graphic novel collaboration with Jon J Muth was published in hardback by Vertigo earlier this year and a softcover version will be released early next year complete with a new Muth cover. Morrison has been perplexed by some criticism of *Mystery Play* like in *The Comics* Journal which read into it stuff which wasn't there in the first place and then took him to task for not carrying it through:

"*Mystery Play* dealt with this obsession I've had for so long about the death of God. I thought I had to deal with it, finalise it and bring it to a closure and I wanted to do it in that book. The basic idea was the murder of God so I thought *How do I make that work in the story*. The idea of killing an actor playing God came to mind and I began to think about the British mystery plays." (Mystery plays were ancient morality plays performed in England centuries ago which celebrated the Christian cycle from Creation to Doomsday). Morrison took the archetypal form of the mystery play and transposed it onto a modern day setting. "I was looking at them and what they represented at one time and how they might be applied to the state of the world now. I could then deal with the characters as these ridiculous large icons." However, he doesn't believe that mystery plays have made a positive contribution to British culture. "I think mystery plays are more what's bad about British culture, this kind of small town, repressive mentality which is

Big Dave © Fleetway Editions

The Invisibles © Grant Morrison

Bizarre Boys © Grant Morrison
Peter Milligan and Jamie Hewlett

Invisible Boy CONTINUED

perfectly happy with the way I interpret his scripts and I'm happy to work with his scripts." However, Yeowell doesn't feel that he is as close to Morrison the person: "Somebody said of Noel Coward that his greatest invention was himself and when I heard that I realised that the same was true of Grant. There's a complete paradox between his character in print and his character in real life."

Yeowell's most recent comic shop shelf appearance has been in the third instalment of *Witchcraft*, Vertigo's century spanning revenge drama featuring the Three Witches from *Witching Hour* and *Sandman*: "That was good fun. I've worked with (writer) James Robinson a couple of times in the past, first for an abortive strip for *Revolver*, 'Mystery Tour'. It was set in California and was semi-autobiographical, about an Englishman moving to L.A. and the experiences he has and the adventures he gets caught up in, James having moved out there at the time. But, of course, it bit the dust when Revolver folded. We did send the proposal to Art Young when he was still working for Disney setting up Touchmark, but he decided that the strip wouldn't have anything in it to offer an American audience. It was far more interesting from the British point of view but Americans are well aware of Melrose and crap joints, etc..."

After 'Mystery Tour', Yeowell and Robinson next got together to work on the Epic graphic novel, *67 Seconds*, an under-rated love story set in an alternative World War scenario which actually takes place over a minute and a bit which, unfortunately suffered from no promotion and duly sank without a trace. "James is a big fan of Frank Capra. He likes stories with 1930s and '40s settings." *Witchcraft* is their highest profile effort together yet. Yeowell likes the thought that he is closest geographically to the story's London setting out of his fellow artists, Teddy Kristiansen, Peter Snejbjerg and Michael Zulli. However, he researched the setting for Witchcraft as much as *Invisibles*: "Its mostly interior shots anyway. I had to fake the opening scene which I think takes place in South London."

He has also recently drawn a 10 page 'Banshee' hack up for this year's X-Men Annual which is set to appear late August. "I got that because the writer, Jim Kruiger, was a big Zenith fan to the extent of having all the copies of *2000AD* which have got the full series in. It must have taken an awful lot of effort on his part to find since *2000AD* isn't exactly common over in the States. The story is set during the 1960s when Banshee was an Interpol agent and it cuts between 1960s Ireland and the 1990s." Yeowell admits that drawing the X-Men is "not the sort of opportunity that comes your way every day" and obviously wouldn't mind doing more. In fact, he is talking to Kruiger about doing an X-related project with Morrison and Millar.

I wonder how Yeowell enjoyed working 'Marvel method' as opposed to the usual full script? "It was an interesting experience. Looking at it now, I can see areas where I could have improved on it. I'd like to do it again just

in there, rather than what's good which perhaps comes out in some of my other stuff."

Morrison is most enthusiastic about his long awaited *Flex Mentallo* project. Instead of a mini-series, it will now be an extra length one shot which will probably appear under the Vertigo Visions banner. He has high hopes for *Flex Mentallo* which he describes as "a superhero comic for the 21st Century." Featuring the former *Doom Patrol* character, the book won't feature any D.C. Universe characters but will explore the whole Superman concept. No artist has been selected yet but Morrison plans to start writing it soon. "I really don't want to say too much about what's in it. During the period when I was doing nothing but travelling and thinking I just came up with what seemed to me to be silly, radical, new ideas about what superheroes are, what they can do and what they can talk about. As far as I'm concerned, this is my *Dark Knight or Watchmen*. This is the definitive statement that I've come up with right now about superheroes.

"Flex is basically the way he was when he left *Doom Patrol*. The last thing he said in Doom Patrol was that superheroes are really miserable and depressed and its time to put a smile on the face of the war against crime. He's this real naive, primitive superhero, very basic in a Charles Atlas fashion who I just have wandering through this nightmarish, urban landscape. The whole idea of superheroes and what they represent comes through and again its more like the feeling of *The Invisibles* than the feel of *Doom Patrol*."

Morrison's D.C. work recently included a helping hand on Mark Millar's Swamp Thing by co-writing the opening 'Bad Gumbo' four parter with him. D.C. were looking for a replacement for Nancy Collins but weren't interested in Millar since they weren't familiar with his work. So, Morrison volunteered to co-write it with him and helped plot out the story framework for the next two or three years. Morrison and Millar have been the first writers on *Swamp Thing* apart from Rick Veitch not to be in awe of Alan Moore since his groundbreaking run on the book ended. They have even harked back to Wein and Wrightson's original run as they turned Swampie back into a monster again. Morrison rightly points out that Millar has really hit his stride with his second solo issue (#145) while he reckons that the stuff Millar is currently writing (which won't appear for a year) is his best yet.

It seems unlikely that Morrison will write any more D.C. Universe characters for the foreseeable future. He thinks that D.C. may even be reluctant to let him get his hands on them after what he has done in the past to the likes of Animal Man. He and Millar submitted a proposal for a big crossover series a couple of years ago. Nothing came of it but Morrison can't help but notice passing similarities to the current *Zero Hour*.

NO LIMITS

Away from D.C., Morrison hit the headlines last year when he guest scripted three issues of Todd McFarlane's *Spawn*. The exact amount he received for *Spawn* seemed to double every time, eventually settling at $450,000 for three days work. "Spawn was good fun, and there was a lot of money in it. That stuff is fairly easy to write as you can imagine. I grew up reading those kinds of superhero comics and it was just a case of thinking what do the kids want from *Spawn*; I imagined they wanted lots of explosions and bright lights and I kind of did that for three issues."

Morrison enjoyed his stint working for Image and obviously won't mind working for them again. "As far as I'm concerned, the guys who work at Image are doing what they want. What they want is not necessarily what I want but I kind of admire the fact that they're actually putting their heart and souls such as they are into that kind of work: that's obviously what they're into and they're doing it for themselves because they don't *need* to do it because they're so rich. So, to that extent, they're not doing it on a production line basis and I can admire that even if I don't always enjoy the work. And I like the fact that it's so pop culture: Image is like a 2 Unlimited single and it works on its own level. But that's it, basically...you wouldn't really want to read them 100 years from now."

Again with Mark Millar, and John Smith, Morrison was behind last year's highly successful *2000AD* Summer Offensive, the only disappointment being that *2000AD* returned to the same old sorry stuff immediately afterwards. Morrison is working on another Judge Dredd story which he says will be his "definitive Dredd." This will be preceded by a Janus series, featuring the Cadet Psi-Judge from the 'Inferno' epic which will lead directly into the Dredd story.

However, Morrison's most

HOW DID I GET TO BE LIKE THIS? THAT'S WHAT I KEEP ASKING MYSELF.
IT'S JUST...WELL, I NEVER EXPECTED TO BECOME QUITE SO HIDEOUS. LIKE FAIRY GOLD TURNED TO DROSS IN THE COLD LIGHT OF DAY.
I HEARD ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED TO JOHN-A-DREAMS.
YOU'LL BE SEARCHING FOR A NEW RECRUIT, I PRESUME.
WE'VE FOUND HIM. HE'S YOUNG. HE NEEDS A LOT OF TRAINING. THAT'S WHY I CAME HERE.
WE CAN'T LOCATE TOM. I'D LIKE YOU TO CONTACT HIM. I KNOW YOU STILL HAVE A LINK.

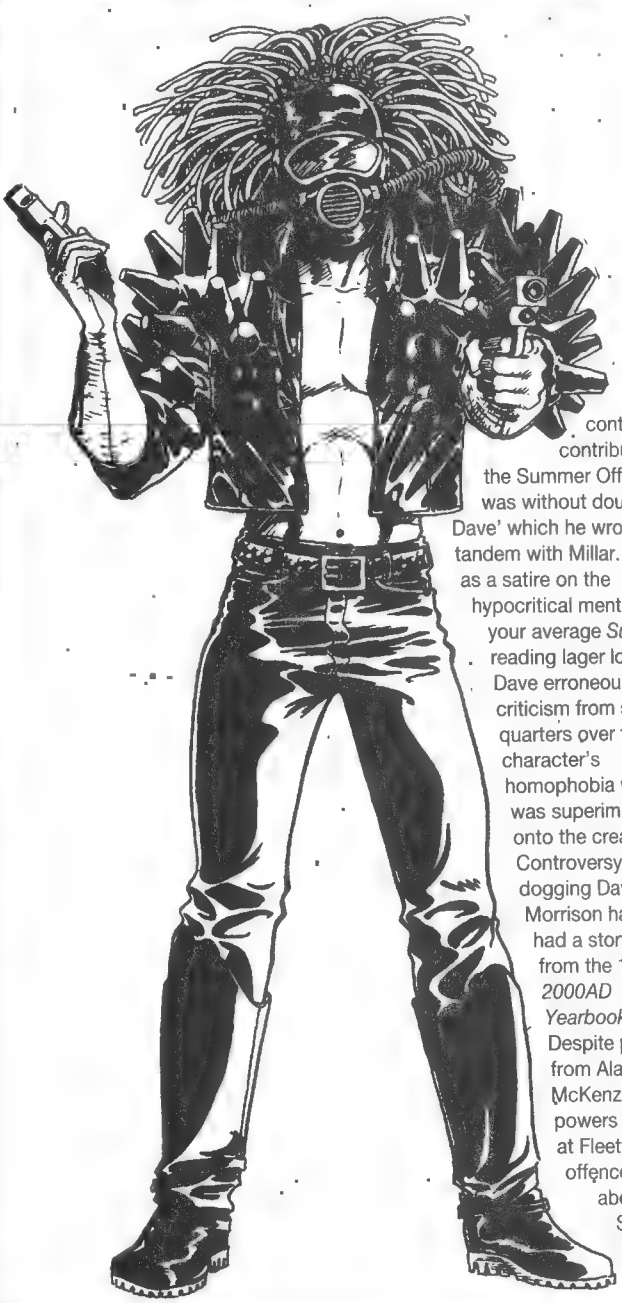
THERE'S A COMPLETE PARADOX BETWEEN [GRANT'S] CHARACTER IN PRINT AND HIS CHARACTER IN REAL LIFE

because I think I could perhaps do a much better job." But does he prefer either way of working? "I think they've both got their strengths. I like them both for different reasons; I've obviously got far more latitude with the Marvel method...I start to think maybe it would be nice to have some kind of plot to break the pages down from rather than having that very rigid sequence of panels structure. In fact, when James and I did *67 Seconds*, we actually used a technique which was a kind of compromise between a full script and the Marvel method where James actually just wrote a running commentary of what was going to be going on over the course of a particular page but he also provided all the dialogue. I broke everything down into a number of panels, placing dialogue where I thought it appropriate. The page then went back to James and he edited his dialogue."

STYLE

Yeowell's style has changed considerably over the years since the early days of Zenith. "I'm definitely more confident in my style. I tend to be a bit restless as well. I always notice my style changing every 20 or 30 pages." Does he use photo reference at all? "Everyone uses photo reference to an extent and I did use photos to research the council estate. I also use photo reference for any trick lighting effect, double sided lighting, etc. I've got a scrapbook that's got good shots of useful looking characters and a few useful drapery shots that I used for a while. I went through a phase where I used Illustrator's Reference during the third Zenith series but I found was that I was becoming too reliant on it so I decided to stop. I do keep a sketchbook and I refer back to that if I need details of drapery and that sort of thing."

Yeowell also much prefers to ink his own work. "As much as anything it always feels like easy money - all the hard work's in the pencilling for me, so inking your own work is almost like a reward." He did work with an inker when he pencilled 'Zoids' during his fledgeling years at Marvel U.K. This reminds me of a curiosity that I spotted in the bibliography printed with his last *Comic*



controversial contribution to the Summer Offensive was without doubt 'Big Dave' which he wrote in tandem with Millar. Meant as a satire on the hypocritical mentality of your average *Sun* reading lager lout, Big Dave erroneously drew criticism from some quarters over the character's homophobia which was superimposed onto the creators. Controversy is still dogging Dave as Morrison has just had a story pulled from the 1995 *2000AD Yearbook*. Despite protests from Alan McKenzie, the powers that be at Fleetway took offence: "It was about Salman Rushdie. They said that it was racist. The editorial staff don't want to pull the thing but they've been given directives from above - I don't know exactly how far above, but certainly they don't want to do it..." However, another 'Big Dave' strip is due to appear in *2000AD in September*: "We managed to get England winning the World Cup." Which is certainly better than what Graham Taylor did. Morrison contends that he and Millar should have been put in charge.

Morrison has never been one to shy clear of controversy. "I like to make something happen. I get angry about things for a day and then just forget about them...usually I just say something and I've forgotten it by the time people start turning it into a major confrontation." He came in for a lot of flack at last year's Caption convention (as reported in *Comics Journal #163*) when he was alleged to have said in his last *Comic World* interview that he would rather read an old issue of The Flash than a small press or alternative comic. "It's obviously a case of somebody trying to use your words to make some kind of weird propaganda point. I don't know who said it, but either they misread it or they deliberately wanted me to say something else. It's no big deal, but what I said in *Comic World* was that I prefer reading a John Broome *Flash* than any American underground comic." Morrison agrees that some elements of the small press community may well have a chip on their shoulder: "It's understandable because people like me are making a lot of money, and they probably think the work isn't that good. All they have to do is try harder."

Morrison has always been keen to make connections between comics and the music scene. I wonder what his opinion is of Marvel's new Music Line as seen in the Alice Cooper/Neil Gaiman collaboration, *The Last Temptation*? "I just think its ridiculous. As usual they haven't latched onto anything even mildly interesting. I don't know what Neil Gaiman has done...maybe he's done something fabulous but the very fact it's Alice Cooper...

"I don't know who they're aiming at but then again teenage kids in America love that stuff and to them Alice Cooper is probably still a happening character. If you're going to do it, you've got to use interesting bands which are about now and get it out quick and also do something which uses the techniques of music." Morrison has played in a few bands himself but hasn't done anything for a while. "The last thing I did was some recording with Jo Callis, who used to be in the Human League. Basically I think I'm past it."

Morrison has gone out of his way to create a separate persona for Grant Morrison the writer and media figure as opposed to Grant the person. "What you do is take elements of your personality and blow them out of all proportion and then set the place on fire. For a while I was pretending to be this fey Morrisey style figure and then I decided to be a tough action man because I happened to be doing martial arts. I think more people should do it because it makes interviews more fun than reading about what kind of ink someone uses. Again, its the whole pop idea; I really do believe that there are lots of interesting people doing comics and they should be personalities in the same way that the *N.M.E.* will interview people who make singles rather than just concentrating on the product. I think you should be concentrating on the personalities behind the product." CW

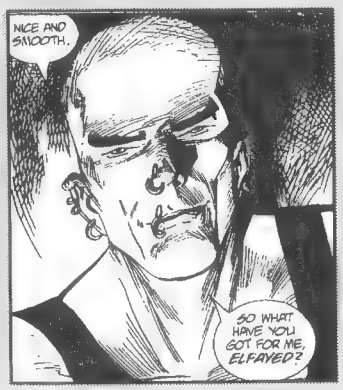
Invisible Boy CONTINUED

World interview - a 'Master of Kung Fu' strip written by Morrison: "That was quite an interesting project. Marvel wanted to reprint the Paul Gulacy 'Master of Kung Fu' stories in Action Force and decided that the best way to introduce them was by having the *Action Force* character Quickkick introduce Shang Chi as a friend from way back and provide the origin story that way for all the kids to jump on."

Yeowell is not the sort of artist to burn the midnight oil: "I'm very much a 9 to 5 artist. I have to have that rigid business day structure in order to get the work down. What I tend to do is start work about 8:30 and then finish around 5:00 or 5:30 and then work in the evenings for a few hours if I have to depending on deadline pressure although I really start burning out about mid afternoon to be honest."

Mark Millar has been another of Yeowell's frequent collaborators in recent occasions. The most recent being 'Maniac 5' which was part of last year's *2000AD* Summer Offensive. "Maniac 5 was great fun to do. Maybe it shows but I believe Mark wrote it in a very short period of time; the intensity of that creative experience came over and what I tried to do is approach it almost as a computer game with lots of explosions and big panels, sort of like an Image comic I suppose." Yeowell has also pencilled a *Legends of the Dark Knight* one-off written by Millar and is waiting to ink it. He doesn't know when that will see the light of day but the story is set at Christmas.

Yeowell also enjoyed his brief fill-in on *Shade the Changing Man #42* where he got to draw part of the 'History Lesson' story. "That was a good script too. I enjoyed depicting a bit of melodrama and that was a very melodramatic issue, where they announced Kathy's pregnancy." However, Yeowell's style did seem to conflict somewhat with the regular art team of Chris Bachalo and Rick Bryant: "The pages I was allocated was really (editor) Shelly Roeberg's choice. Maybe my style did jar a little bit but I was pleased with the way it turned out."



Does Yeowell miss drawing Zenith? "I do and I don't...I miss him because I love him as a character but I don't miss him because every series I did, I'd have to re-design his costume and I'm sure I'd be struggling for ideas." Yeowell laughs at the idea of him and Morrison bringing Zenith back in 20 years time as a past-it Fat Elvis figure. "Yeah, well, you never know!" CW

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What if...?

PART TWO

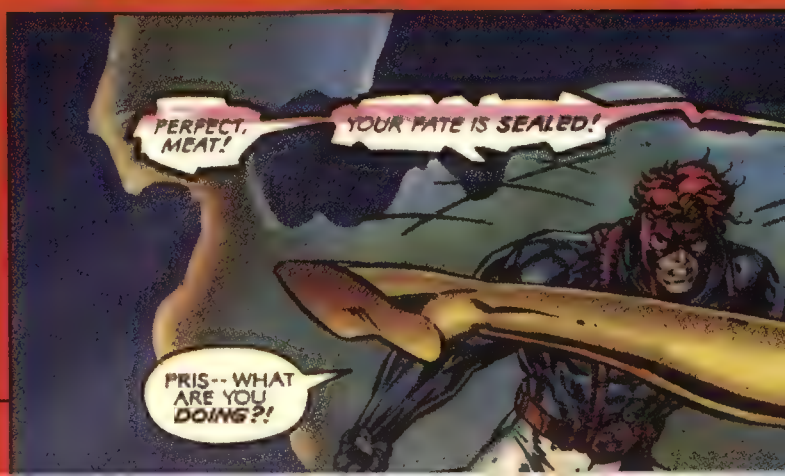
DEZ SKINN CONTINUES HIS CHAT WITH CHRIS CLAREMONT ABOUT WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN...

Chris Claremont: The recent issue of *X-Men* where Scott and Jean got married. I have to tell you, if I had stayed on the book: not a chance, because everyone would be sitting around waiting for it. Everyone was waiting for Wolverine to marry Mariko, but you screw it up. You screw it up in a way that is consistent with the character and leaves the reader going 'What happens next? Where is this going to go?'. OK, so Scott and Jean have got married. So what? Now what are they going to do with them?

'We're going to the future to see what happened to Nathan and Stryfe and Cable'. Like, who cares?

Wolverine writes a letter: 'Dear Jean...' I'm sorry, but I started reading this and it's like...Wolverine writes a letter saying: 'Dear Jean, this ol' canucklehead's gotta go find himself' and I'm thinking *Did I miss something*? I mean, I'm sorry, let's weigh this here; Wolverine loves Mariko, Mariko's dead. She gets shuffled off stage, gratuitously.

So he still carries a torch for Jean...OK that's fine. Jean is marrying Scott so what's Scott's track record to date? Well...he had a wife, he got married in the mansion, everybody was there, he said 'Till death do us part', they had a kid, and he walked out on them without a second thought and went to X-Factor. And then for stupid reasons, and I confess I had my part in this as well as anyone else, plot reasons didn't deal with it for a long time. The reason we didn't deal with it was because we didn't have a clue what to do with it. I mean, the guy was a cad



LORD MAGNETO, WE'RE MUTANTS LIKE YOU!
NE'VE OME TO VE, TO OGE OUR S TO YOUR RIOUS USE!
THOSE DAYS ARE DONE, WOMAN. THAT MAN IS NO MORE.
IN MERCY'S NAME, YOUR PEOPLE NEED YOU, NOW MORE THAN EVER!
CAN YOU ABANDON THEM? CAN YOU DENY YOUR DESTINY?!
PANNER

[IN X-MEN] I WANTED TO KILL WOLVERINE

and a bounder.

If one fell swoop he was destroyed as a heroic character. He made a commitment to people and then walked out on them. And for various reasons, neither Weezie (Louise Simonson) nor me dealt with it. We took what seemed to be the only sensible way out which was to make Madelyne bad. We set up a situation where, rather than have Scott face up to the consequences of his actions, we'd just, like, kill them all. And everyone forgave Scott because Madelyne was a bitch anyway. And then...they gave the kid away. Don't deal with the fact you have a child, Scott. We'll just send him away to the future and...shit happens.

All of this should be an element in the mix, mistakes or otherwise, this is Scott's character, this is Jean's character, there must be a moment - maybe there was a moment because I don't know - where the two of them sit down and address this.

'Jean, marry me?'

'Why?'

'I love you.'

'You loved Madelyne.'

'...'

'You walked out on her, Scott. You gonna walk out on me? Suppose we discover in a year that Madelyne isn't dead? Suppose I'm Madelyne? Suppose I'm Phoenix? How are you going to deal with that?

How am I to trust you? You made a commitment, you did not fulfil it. You abandoned your child.'

What I was trying to do with Wolverine and Mariko was that Mariko, under Mastermind's control, dumped Wolverine at the altar. She insulted him about as fundamentally as you can insult someone in Japan.

When it was revealed that she had been coerced and that it wasn't her fault, her reaction was 'You've proved yourself worthy to be my consort, I must now prove myself worthy to be your wife'. I never got to fulfil the story to its end and the same thing should apply here with with Scott and Jean.

The onus is not on Jean to prove herself to Scott. She was dead, she got better. He made a commitment to someone, he has to prove that he can make a commitment to her. You can't just say that none of it happened - you have to think, how does the character deal with it? How does the story deal with it?

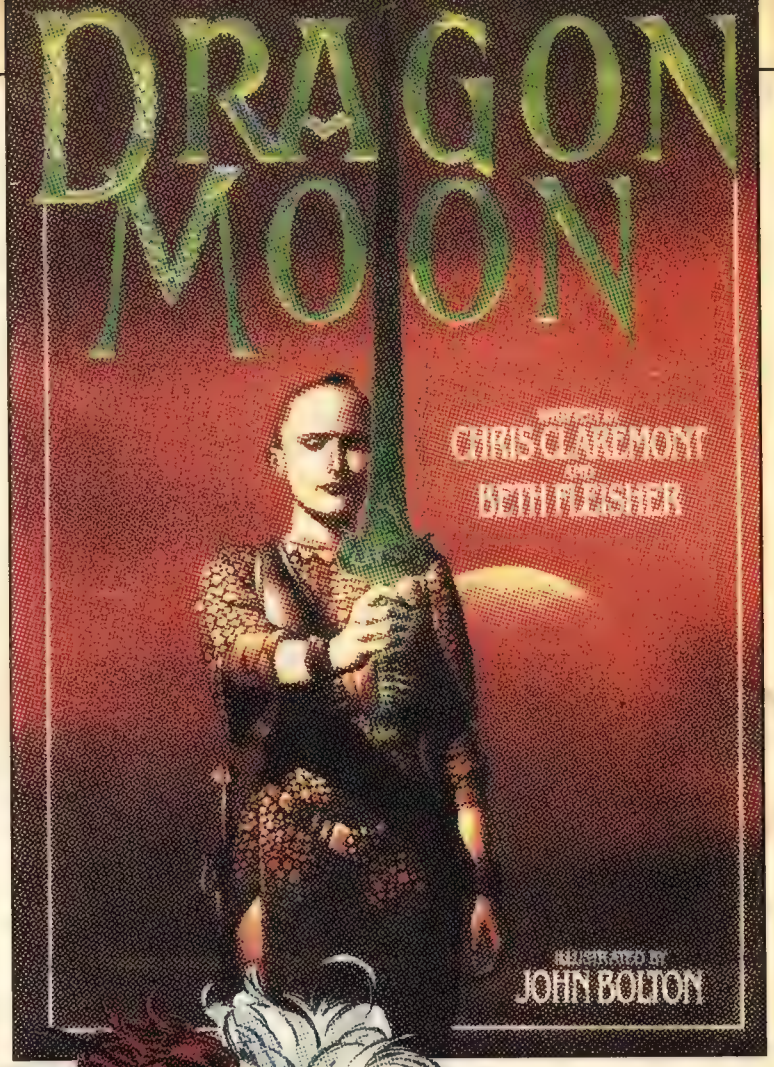
Because by answering those questions you might find the story going off in a totally different direction that may bring a vitality and richness of concept that you never even dreamed was coming in the door.

You may have to be open to the inspirations, the changes or the evolution. I was talking with Ralph Macchio, just bullshitting about the FF, and I was saying 'You know, why kill them? I mean, *Nobody gets out alive*, it's like, if you wanna change the FF...OK, Reed's dead. Well, think about this; you wanna new FF, you've got Franklin, you've got Rachel, Johnny and Lyja's kid, and you've got Namorita - you could build an entire FF. A Fantastic Four: The Next Generation. Kids who come together to continue and fulfil the paradigm, the dream, whatever, established by Reed when he built the FF in the first place. So maybe the brains of the outfit is Johnny and Lyja's kid, because somehow the Skrull genetics make him a genius. He's Reed's son in spirit if not in flesh. Maybe Franklin is the strong guy'. You can see where it leads.

I don't know if this is serendipity or if Ralph was actually listening, but I said 'Why not have Namor and Sue get together. Sue's available. He's available. Why not have her say Yes, why not have her commit to Namor? Become his wife, become an Atlantean, and then...bring Reed back and deal with the consequences! 'You were dead, Reed!.' 'Well, I'm not dead now.' 'I'm married.'

Derek G. Skinn: After Namor's 30-year courtship maybe they could retitle the book *Fantastic Foreplay*?

CC: It used to be



when you work in comics you provide the illusion of change. You do a lot of stuff and make people think something is happening, but nothing has really happened. If you look at the X-Men over my seventeen year run, what I was hoping for was, if you pick up *X-Men #94* and *X-Men #194* they should be different. There should be evolution - the Wolverine you read in *#94* is not the Wolverine you should read in *#194* or the Wolverine you read in *#294*. He should grow, he should evolve. Storm should be different, Kitty should be different; the dynamics of the group should change. The downside is that it pisses some readers off.

I found myself in this situation where collaborators would come up to me and say 'I got into comics reading the stuff you did with Byrne or Paul Smith. Why don't you do the old stuff?'

I did the old stuff. I did the old stuff ten years ago. I'm doing new stuff now. 'Yeah, but I want to do the old stuff'. Sorry, but it's my book - and therein lies the seeds of destruction, because it wasn't my book, it was Marvel's book.

DGS: But if you have a new generation of 12-year-olds every five years and you're evolving characters, doesn't it become to complex for today's 12-year-olds?

CC: The evolution is to keep it vital. If you freeze it and today's X-Men are the same X-Men that were read in 1974, what relationship do they have to an audience in 1994? It's not the same world, not the same people, not the same attitudes. Case of point: Storm's costume. Her original costume made a certain amount of sense in 1975, but in 1985 it was like 'Ugh!' The new costume, the biker costume made a lot of sense, especially the way Paul (Smith) drew it. It would probably make sense today because punk fashion hasn't really grown anywhere, which is really depressing, but it evolved again. I, personally, wasn't exactly thrilled with the new costume design we came up with. It was dumb, but at that point I wasn't making those decisions and I didn't have any input into it.

X-Men © Marvel Entertainment

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Dragon Moon cover © John Bolton

#1 X-MAN

DGS: Where did you want X-Men to go?

CC: Oh, good stories, good characterisation, fun and games. I wanted to kill Wolverine.

DGS: This was before Superman was killed. You must have felt really annoyed when they killed off Superman and got the publicity.

CC: I was off the book for a year at that point. I didn't care. I was pissed off about other things.

I remember sitting there after I had my big meeting with Terry Stewart and realised I was walking away from my career, *I'm thinking I'm handling this really well. I'm cool about it. I'm a mature individual. I'm forty years old, this isn't my mid-life crisis. This is birth and change...*

$2000 worth of damage to my wife's car later...

In New York we have a thing called opposite side of the street parking where you have to move from one side of the street to the other so that the street cleaners can come through. So I move the car, and the time comes for me to move it back into its proper parking space. So I climb in, pull across the street...and it won't stop! There's this van and the car won't stop. It just went **Thump** right into the rear bumper. Do you know how loud car crashes are? Car's come built with these great little amplifiers, so that if you run into someone at under five miles an hour they hear it for miles. Everybody looks. And my wife is thinking 'My God, he's had a heart attack...Are you alright? Chris? What's wrong?

'It wouldn't stop, it wouldn't stop.'

'Were you pressing the brake?'

'Yes of course. I had it pressed full down', and I looked down and there was the clutch. And I thought Well, maybe I'm not handling this quite so well as I thought.

What would have happened had I stayed around? Um...

My original idea for *X-Men #1* was to do a double sized entry level book. What do we do with 53 X-Men? I had this great sequence worked out where, we sort of hinted at it in *X-Men #1*, I wanted to do this five page scene where Storm and Scott are in the danger room. Scott's up in the booth, Storm's down on the floor. You have this incredible fight going on - Brotherhood of Evil vs. the X-Men - bodies flying everywhere. Storm just wanders through the middle of it, fights going on all around her, and she's taking notes.

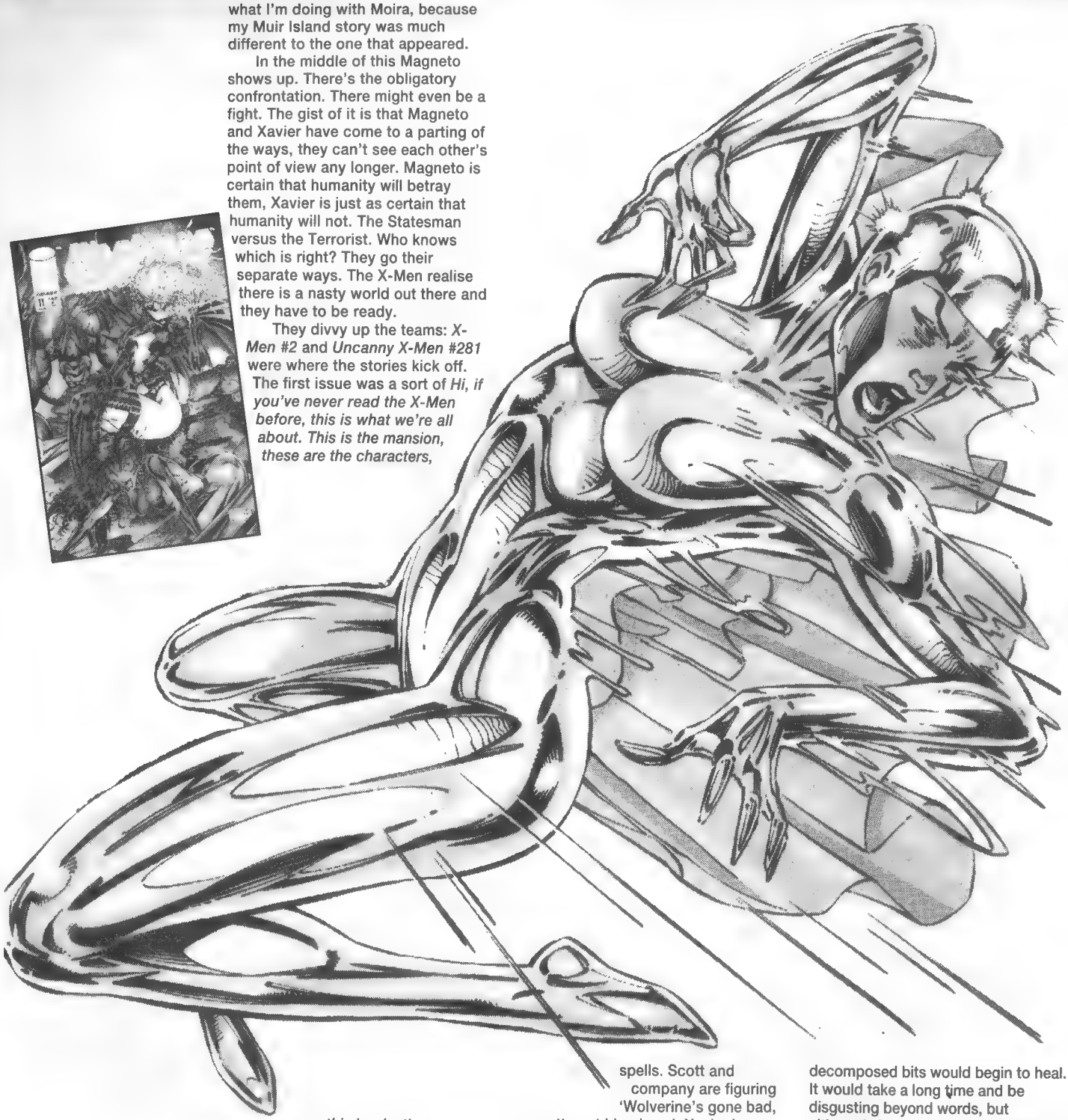
They freeze it, displays appear assessing everybody's performance. And what Scott and Storm are doing is running scenarios, mixing various members of the teams. A twelve man team is unwieldy, you need six people teams. Who's the best mix? Does Jean go with Storm or with Scott? Where does Wolverine go? If Wolverine goes somewhere where does Jubilee go? Should Jubilee go anywhere, or are we doing Kitty all over again? Show them actually working this out, figuring out where do we go from here?

Here's Xavier trying to deal with

what I'm doing with Moira, because my Muir Island story was much different to the one that appeared.

In the middle of this Magneto shows up. There's the obligatory confrontation. There might even be a fight. The gist of it is that Magneto and Xavier have come to a parting of the ways, they can't see each other's point of view any longer. Magneto is certain that humanity will betray them, Xavier is just as certain that humanity will not. The Statesman versus the Terrorist. Who knows which is right? They go their separate ways. The X-Men realise there is a nasty world out there and they have to be ready.

They divvy up the teams: *X-Men #2* and *Uncanny X-Men #281* were where the stories kick off. The first issue was a sort of *Hi, if you've never read the X-Men before, this is what we're all about. This is the mansion, these are the characters, this is why the characters exist and this is the world they live in.*



Issue 2, I was going to kill Wolverine. He would have a fight with Lady Deathstrike and she would rip out his heart. She'd die, he'd die. Except he wouldn't die, because he has a healing factor, and he has his followers. So the Hand grab the body and resurrect him; he comes back as the master assassin of the Hand for two years, leading up to *Uncanny X-Men #294* he would be the X-Men's greatest foe. The story would range from *Uncanny* to *X-Men* and back again. Jean would go in and try to rescue him and end up becoming his evil babe, though not really - she would be faking it this time. She is trying to tap into the Wolverine which is buried beneath all of the Hand's spells. Scott and company are figuring 'Wolverine's gone bad, we gotta put him down'. Xavier is unmoveably adamant about the need to save him, the need to salvage him, to bring him back to the light. Along the way, an interesting thing was going to happen: Wolverine's healing factor went into ultra gear when he was 'killed' - it was essentially rebuilding his heart. What would have happened if he had been left alone, his arms and legs probably - this is really disgusting - but his arms and legs would have rotted as his heart healed. His conscious mind would have been in total suspended animation, everything about him would have been geared towards keeping his sentiency intact and repairing his heart. Everything else would be left to go. So assuming no scavengers came in and started to eat him, you would find this partially decomposed body, with a fully healed torso, at which point the decomposed bits would begin to heal. It would take a long time and be disgusting beyond words, but ultimately he would have survived. The idea was Wolverine really is almost as impossible to kill as Death's Head and much more charming and better looking.

Anyway, one of the side effects of this, the healing factor is purging all non-organic matter, which means the adamantium. So what was going to happen was that it was starting to leech out of his skin. There would be a time where Wolverine would look like the Silver Surfer with hair. He's be this blinding, shining creature with killer claws. Ultimately, the adamantium would just be part of his hair - he'd look like a silver porcupine. At some point in the storyline, Colossus and he would have a major fight and it would have this great cover: it would be a black background with a spotlight of light, and in the centre of the spotlight

are two sets of claws with the housings, just as if they had been ripped out of his arms, and one of the claws would be broken. What was going to happen in that issue was that Colossus was just going to pull the claws off from their roots.

So, of course, the Hand would then give him artificial claws. They would work or not work as the case may be, but again as part and parcel of the healing process, gradually he would realise that he was growing something new, that there was a natural element in his body that gives him claws. And over a span of six issues, you would see them grow. They would be growing faster than normal because of the accelerated healing.

So, when all is said and done, it would come down to a major league fight between the X-Men and Wolverine. A major component of the fight would be Wolverine's battle with himself - the goodness of his soul, the warrior of his soul fighting this demon he has become, and he would win. The adamantium would flake off and eventually he would stand reborn as a totally natural being. His bones and claws would be virtually unbreakable. They could be broken, but they would also heal.

In the course of my storyline you could cut Wolverine and the cut would heal instantly, shoot him - he doesn't notice. He's healing so fast that normal wounds, normal injuries just have no effect on him. So he got used to the fact that he would butt walls with his head.

When all is said and done, Wolverine is more vulnerable. It is like Wolverine has come face to face with his own mortality and his own limitations. But at the same time it would create a bond between him and Jean like nothing that's gone before, so that even if she was still in love with Scott there would be a level of communication between her and Wolverine that Scott could only dream about - or have nightmares about.

At the end of all of this, it would lead to a final confrontation with the Shadow King. And that was my core storyline for the first two years of *X-Men*.

Now, as I understand it, they haven't done any of that...

EX-MAN

CC: Obviously it looks like a lot of the stuff they're doing is the stuff I was planning to do, but actually my plotline was rejected by Bob Harras, his comment being that it is all very well, but what do we do with *Wolverine* in Wolverine at the same time? How could I co-op Larry Hama's plots for the next two years? I said 'Hey, he can adapt. I write the X-Men, he writes *Wolverine*, which is the senior book?' Bob would come and shake his head and act as if he couldn't deal with this person any more. I had my vision and Bob (Harras) had his vision. We were getting further and further apart. Marvel had to step in and play referee and from there point of view they did what they felt they had to do. I might think it was a dumb move, but that's the game plan - those are the terms of which you accept to go to work.

DGS: I seem to remember hearing that you went and they got you back. They felt they couldn't launch a new X-Men title without you?

CC: No, the way we worked it out was, *X-Men #1* was my severance pay. I was ready to walk in March and then my wife pointed out that we had a mortgage. I said, 'Alright, I will stay. I'll do *X-Men #1* to launch it because I feel I've earned it.' And they could live with that.

And the one issue story grew to two or three issues. My point was that I would stay for the first story arc, whether it was one issue, two issues, three issues...I'd gone this far, I was going to go that one extra mile. But basically it was my severance pay. That was how I looked on it.

It was, sadly, not a lot of fun. A lot of people come up and say they really enjoyed those three issues and thought that the ending of #3 was very moving and very powerful, and I nod and thank them for it, and I appreciate the compliments, but it wasn't fun. It wasn't the way I wanted to go. It has got to a point where Bob Harras and I haven't spoken for two years and I wouldn't be surprised if we don't speak again. In the end we were communicating by fax, solely because we wanted to have a written record of what we had said. That's not a working relationship that anyone should have.

In certain respects my plans became null and void while I was still on the book because a book is subject to decisions that the writer has no control over - editors' decisions, publishers' decisions, marketing decisions. On the other hand *WildC.A.T.S.*, which reunites myself and Jim Lee is a very different relationship. Because Jim owns *WildC.A.T.S.* they're his, I own Huntsman and his supporting cast, they're mine. We're sort of doing the equivalent of DC and Marvel collaborations of the seventies where each sides comes in and they shake hands and promise to treat each others characters with respect. As part and parcel of the story we are establishing some fundamental elements, embellishing some, but establishing others about *WildC.A.T.S.* characters: Zealot, her past, her relationship with the *WildC.A.T.S.*, all sorts of stuff.

All of this was something Jim and I sat down and discussed. I wrote the proposal, we talked, we talked some more. I sent in a plot, we talked, I rewrote the plot, he's happy. By the same token the same attitude comes in return as regards Huntsman. I'm not going to screw around with Jim's character, because they're Jim's characters and you don't, especially when you're a guest on someone's book. By the same token, it is incumbent on him to treat my characters with the same respect, because we are guests in his house.

DGS: I'm sure everybody will look forward to seeing it and your future projects. CW

What if...?

CHRIS WROTE AN EXCALIBUR GRAPHIC NOVEL!

I had a specific origin set in mind for Rachel (Summers), all of which has been totally trashed. The Rachel that exists now is nothing like the one I created, nothing like what I wrote when I was on *Excalibur*. Alan (Davis) had his vision and when he took over and took it in his direction, a lot of the stuff that I set out got junked. These things happen.

I had a graphic novel all set up called *True Friends* where Kitty and Rachel go back to 1936 and fight Nazi's. It's a great story and 50 pages exist in pencils and inks, a third of the script, and it will never see print. Marvel has paid for the art, I've never been paid for the story, therefore they don't own the story, so they have no right to print the story. They can scramble the art and change the characters and publish it as something completely different, but I figure it's easiest just to pay off Rick Leonardi and Al Williamson and just bury the art.

The gist of the story was that Kitty and Rachel get flung back to 1936, Kitty meets this handsome young lad up in Scotland and his houseguest, who is an eleven year-old girl named Willabeth, sent north by her parents for the summer. In the course of the story they get involved with Nazis and the plot to discredit the throne and have Oswald Mosely win the next general election, or at least destabilize the country enough so that when the Nazis make their move across Europe, Britain is in no shape to resist. Kitty comes face to face with the fact that she knows what is going to happen. She is a mutant that can phase, she can wipe out the entire hierarchy of the Nazi government in a single night and they would never know - kill Hitler, Himmler, Heidrick, Eichmann, Goering, Goebels - all the top men. She could single-handedly prevent the holocaust. She's a jew, she is born witness to her family's losses in Auschwitz. What does she do?

There's a scene built into it where Kitty, basically, gets to meet Destiny, who has been waiting for her. Destiny's point is, yes, you can do that. What you're talking about is chaos theory to the ultimate extent. If you set this line in motion, how did you deal with it. What do you do in 1967 when Galactus turns up and there's no Fantastic Four to persuade the Silver Surfer to turn against him? What do you do in 1979 when the Shi'Ar emperor opens the final gate and the universe is consumed and there is no X-Men and no Jean Grey to become Phoenix? How do you prevent the disasters that are coming if you change the history that sets in motion the events that forestall them?

There's only one way: you have to control the world. You have to artificially create the FF, the X-Men. You have to manipulate the world to the point that you need it to be to arrive at that crucial junction. To fulfil your desire to prevent the holocaust you must in turn become in her destiny, Saturnine, because what I was setting up in *Excalibur* was that Kitty was Earth's Saturnine, not Courtney.

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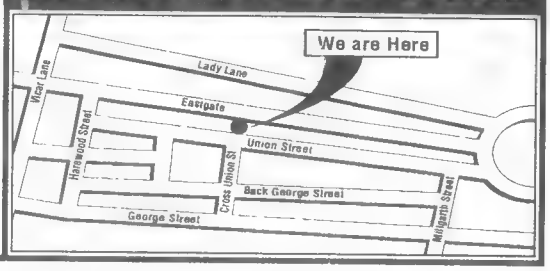

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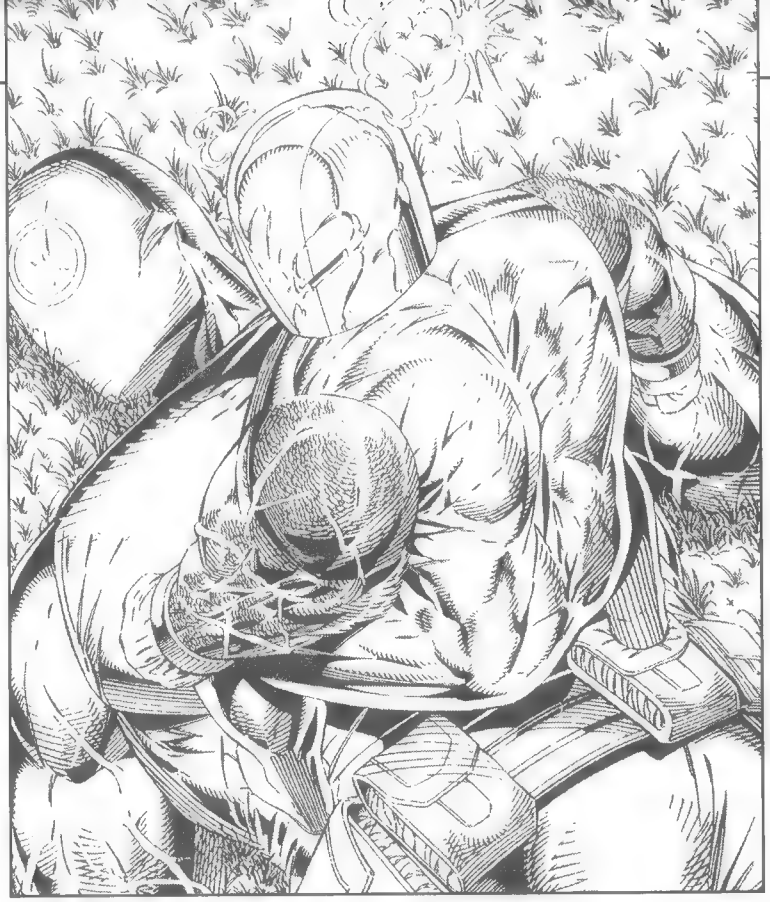


ALAN PORTER PAYS A VISIT TO EXTREME STUDIOS IN SUNNY CALIFORNIA

Any comics fan visiting the original Disneyland in Anaheim just south of Los Angeles will undoubtedly make a five minute detour up Katella Avenue to visit the Mile High Comics Mega-Store. This well publicised site of comic launches is easily visible with its 50 foot sign and painted murals. Drive another quarter of a mile past this comics Mecca and you soon pass another building which houses the architects of the comics revolution of the nineties.

2400 East Katella Avenue is a tall, modern 12-story tower block, typical of California, surrounded by a large carpark with a restaurant tucked away in one corner. A glance up towards the tower reveals the names of The Bank of California and the Disney Corporation. However, taking the elevator to the tenth floor and turning right will bring you face to face with an anonymous set of double doors alongside of which is a small perspex sign proclaiming this to be the home of Extreme Studios.

Extreme Images

Photos by Alan Porter

Stepping through the doors is to suddenly leave behind the world of corporate America and enter the world of colourful super-heroes. The now familiar Extreme Studios logo dominates the reception area along with a racked and sealed display of Extreme's best known products. Enough to make the fanboy drool. Strangely, the only comics available to read were copies of the Valiant/Dark Horse produced *Magnus/Nexus* crossover and Frank Miller's *Sin City*.

I was shown around the studio by R. Matthew Hawkins, Extreme's PR Officer and was immediately struck by the dynamic yet at the same time relaxed atmosphere. This is an office populated by young people doing what they love best - producing comics. in fact, Extreme works on almost a production line process in bringing its comics to the customers. The comic starts life as a series of thumbnail sketches created by the artists on a half size pre-printed form page. This is then passed to a second person who copies the thumbnails onto the traditional twice-up sized Bristol Board. One person is employed solely to do this and handles the work from all the

Art © Rob Liefeld

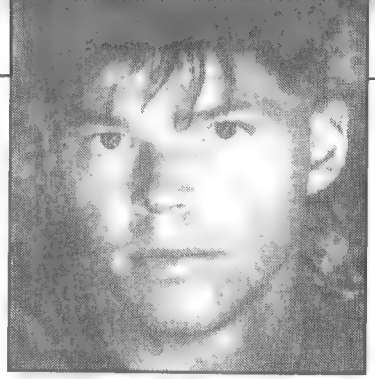
artists in the Extreme stable.

These enlarged sketches are returned to the artist who then fully renders it before it is passed onto a team of up to 3 inkers. it is noticeable that all the inkers appear to use pens as opposed to brushes, accounting for the almost technical feel of some of the finished artwork. A photostat of each page is taken and passed to a master colourist who uses marker pens to produce a guide for the colourists. These guides are used to complete the full colouring process on computers (for the technically minded, they use Adobe Paintshop on Apple Macs).

For consistency, a computer is also used to produce the captions and speech balloons using a library of fonts created by the studio. However, sound effects are still lettered by hand. Interestingly the letterer was the only person to even mention the part played by the script in the process.

The finished pages are printed out and pinned to the approvals wall. The sight of a 20 foot wall covered in glossy prints of stunningly coloured artwork is enough to make any fanboy faint. Every page outputted by Extreme has to be personally approved by Rob Liefeld; even though he was in the studios on the day of my visit, he was locked away in one of his numerous meetings. However, I was lucky enough to spend some time with Art Thibert in his studio/office.

Art's office, like those laid aside for the other artists, was a large, well-appointed room containing drawing



board, desk, light boxes, sofa and coffee table, with still enough room for a dance, a stark contrast to the colourist and inkers working in the bullpen outside his door. In fact, Art was the only artist in residence on the day: it seems Extreme have a very flexible attitude to the working hours of their creative staff.

Despite the production line approach the one thing that appeared to be missing from Extreme was the business discipline being applied by its corporate neighbours. Extreme's next door neighbours being Image Comics, where I was able to share a cup of tea with Publisher Tony Lobito (*Share? That's a bit mean - Steve*) having just returned from the highly successful *Shadowhawk* tour of Australia, but spent some time talking about the role of the Image Comics office.

The Image office is a small suite housing approximately 11 staff, only 3 of which are creative, retained to produce the Inside Image promotional title as well as other promotional material. The rest of the staff are either in managerial, clerical or progress chasing roles; Image only become responsible for a title after the relevant studio has delivered the colour separations to the printers. Image acts as a liaison with both printers and distributors. In an effort to resolve the late shipping of titles after solicitation,

Tony has introduced a scheme where the Image staff will only solicit a title to the distributors after they have seen a preview copy of the comic to ensure it is near completion. We will have to wait to see how effective this will be as it applies to titles solicited from June onwards. In effect, Image is a clearing house for the various studios.

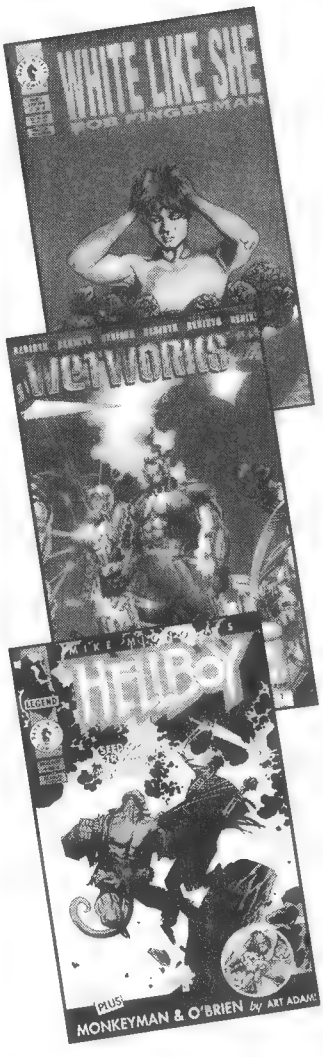
Tony sees his role as that of "negotiator and holder of the purse strings" rather than that of a traditional publisher. As he points out he doesn't know the names of most of the creative staff he publishes - that is left to the individual studios. Tony is more aware of the financial than the creative process.

In his role as negotiator he is also responsible for publishing deals outside the USA, and has recently concluded deals for foreign language reprints in Italy and Spain, with his next target being the massive Japanese market. This will give Image an opportunity to gather further information on which are its most popular titles; as it differs even across the English speaking markets. In the US, *Spawn* and the Extreme titles ship about the same level; in the UK, *Spawn* is easily the top-seller, followed by *Pitt* and *Maxx*, while in Australia, *Shadowhawk* is the runaway best-seller, hence the Australian tour.

Tony is also planning to attend UKCAC this year despite some reservation about its level of promotion compared to US events.

After draining Tony's coffee I headed back down to Katella Avenue en-route to my hotel with a slight detour into the Mile High store. You didn't think I could drive past, did you? CW

Reviews



Contemplate the shape of reality for a few moments. The absolute truth of what is all around us can never be pinned down: there are too many factors to distort it. Recall an event in your mind. Did it really happen the way you remember it, or have you shaped reality to suit your personal needs? Events as they occur are interpreted in a unique way by each witness, depending on his or her emotions, prejudices or drug-taking habits. Watch a film, or create a character in your mind's eye. Aren't the emotions you can feel for imagined people as strong as any you have for someone you can touch? The truth exists only in your head. Dreams and reality are one.

Once reality was a friend of mine, a simple construct of my five senses: but that was before I read **Archie Meets The Punisher 1** (of 1, surely: Archie and Marvel co-publication, $2.95/$3.95). Now the cosmic brakes are off. I feel Planet Earth hurtling away from me. Did they really do it, or is this some stress-induced nightmare?

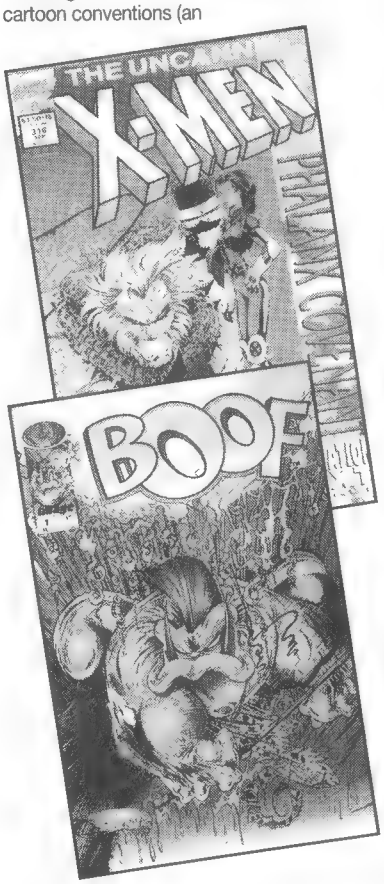
The Punisher you know; Archie is a little-exported American icon with whom you may be less familiar. His friends and he live in a timeless universe with the high school prom at its centre, and a social order based on success at sport for boys, and blondeness for girls. Surreal as it may seem to us, in parts of America it's still out there - waiting to prey on helpless youngsters as they struggle through the education system. Archie comics are famed for beautifully clear storytelling - with the full vocabulary of body language at the command of pros like Dan DeCarlo - and lame, lame jokes.

Marvel's own king semiologist John Buscema joins Stan Goldberg to create a seamless sequence of images. In 48 pages, it's impossible to get lost, try as you might - and oh, how you'll try. Sadly, the plot is flat and weak: only a cameo by Josie And The Pussycats (The L7 of Riverdale High? Not Tarf) can relieve the tedium. But some things are above mortal concerns; there they are, Archie meeting the Punisher.

And I read it again and again, unable to believe my eyes. It's so strange; like a really, really dull acid trip.

Desperate for something which doesn't make my brain feel like it's whirling down the plughole of rational thought, I turn to **Pickle 4** (Black Eye, $2.95), a collection of vignettes which goes nowhere fast, but does so with an adroit playfulness that echoes the dry whimsy of the British small press. Dylan Horrocks is a product of some glorious cosmic melting pot where Phil Elliot and Warren Pleece become one. His fascination with the comics medium and its creators, expressed in many ways throughout his work, is contagious. So far, so good - oh! but then. An appearance by Leonard Batts, critic for the magazine *Comics World*, causes an existential double-take on my part. Whoa! Doubting even my own identity, I stumble on.

Image have done a kids' comic. Hello? **Boof 1** ($1.95), as you'll be able to tell immediately from John Cleary's scrappy house-style artwork, is from the Todd McFarlane stable - home of the Toddster. Blending toned-down Image violence with cartoon conventions (an



on-off feud with the pet dog), Boof's defining element is a macho jock humour which insults and bludgeons on alternate pages.

Don't question anything; just accept, I tell myself. Why look, **Wetworks 1** (Image, $1.95) has come out. And there're *Rocketeer Adventure Magazine 3* and *Starstruck volume 2 number 1* next to it, on the shelf, right there. Everything is possible. Wetworks adheres to the more traditional Image concept - artist draws cool things, sod the story. Although Whilce Portacio's return after an ill-starred absence is welcome - and a relief for him, I'm sure, his layouts are no less confusing than of old, and counteract the momentum of his line. The dialogue fulfils its technical obligations without enthusiasm or invention.

Hellboy 4 (of 4: Dark Horse/Legend imprint, $2.50) whisks us to the exotic side of the great spinning planetoid that is the action hero genre. High flying concepts of mysticism and demonology are bound tighter to the ground with strings of historical background, to convincing effect. Mike Mignola pares down the visual detail, letting impeccable design and colour carry the weight of the story. Art Adams' back-up is day to the lead's night, and its equal.

Bob Fingerman's **White Like She 2** (of 4: Dark Horse, $2.95) is a story about gender politics and brain transplants; of course it is. A new reader will feel disorientated at first, but will catch up easily enough. The story is told solidly, but the earnestness of the plot - learning the true meaning of prejudice through another's eyes - chokes the pace. Fingerman is a capable draughtsman, but needs to inject life into his characters' eyes.

Casey Jones 1 (of 2: Mirage, $2.95) begins with a guy down a sewer spinning a yarn to a bunch of pizza-chomping turtles, and continues with a battle against fish people in a giant snail shell. Nothing can surprise me anymore; I am past the point of questioning things. Rick Veitch unravels a yarn which is sibling to, and promo for, his upcoming 'true dreams' series *Rare Bit Fiends*; the hero's indefatigable uselessness in the tale's wake is revealed with a wry mischief.

I must accept the inevitable; my mind is toffee, unable to cope with the regal madness of all that is within me and without me. But wait. There - my last chance, a final anchor to the comforting humdrum that was life before *Archie Meets The Punisher*. **Uncanny X-Men 316** (Marvel, $2.95) formally kicks off the crossover - with three separate, vaguely concurrent strands just to keep things simple which will lead into *Generation X*. The evil Phalanx strikes some more, but Banshee and the future core of Gen-X fight back. I'm reassured, but I need more to stop myself succumbing to insanity. Enter Scott Lobdell's attempts at scripting English and Irish accents. Like all truly great comics dialogue, the contents of this issue are best enjoyed through laughing yourself senseless while reading them out loud. Scott, I thank you. Reality asserts itself once again and begorrah, I am saved.

Richard Hill

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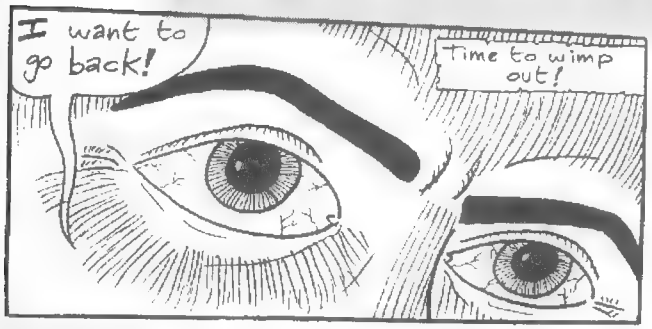
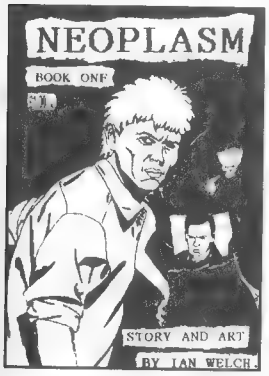
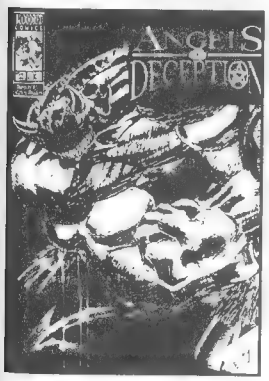
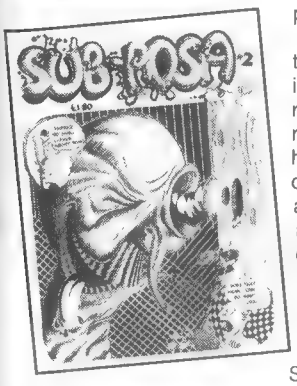
Small Press









Phew, it's the hottest evening of the year and I'm sweltering in my garret reading comics instead of enjoying the weather. No wonder I glow in the dark for most of the year. If anyone has an Amstrad Notepad (one of the cheapo ones with a decent keyboard) they want to sell so I can work outside as well, contact me via Comic World. This is a serious offer!

Grim Smith (AKA Matt Dyer) sums up a nights drinking in the pub, in the excellent **Buy This Comic #6**. His reproduction of an Exploding Cinema slide show is a simple, but brilliant punk tale of urban angst. Yeah, really! The comic has a definite underground/punk feel to it, with the exception of Dream, a not bad at all cyberpunk storyette. Syd from Concerned Muthers has a brief appearance too. In true punk / D.I.Y. style, this is cheaply put together, but worth every penny. 60p and an A4 SAE to 106 Victoria Road, Wood Green, London N22 4XF.

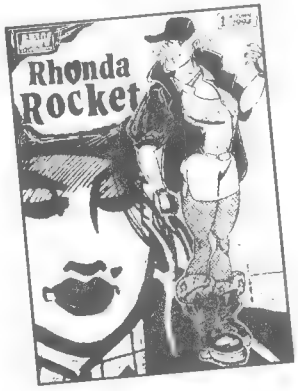
I really thought I was going to like **Rhonda Rocket**, the art is quite vibrant, the storyline has a 'Future Shocks' feel to it and seems quite fun, but just one thing ruined the comic for me. Nick Taylor, the artist and writer seems to have a real problem with swear words. Almost every line has the characters swearing, which would be fine, except that he uses the words 'blooping' or 'bleeping' instead of real swearing. Now I can see no reason at all to do this except as some form of perverse self censorship. It totally ruins what could have been a good comic, I mean come on, 5 assorted bleeps and bloops on one page of just 7 word balloons. I dunno! If you want to give this a try and maybe write to Nick telling him to drop the bleeps in the next issue, write to Square Jaw Productions, 53 St. Davids Road North, St. Annes-On-Sea, Lancashirel FY8 2BS. I would tell you how much to send, but as there's no price on it, or in it, I won't bother.

Neoplasm is speculative fiction from the pen of Ian Welch, who was also involved with *Angels Of Deception* reviewed below. This grew on me as I read it, the art is moody, with lots of heavy black and the story is well constructed. It deals with a future where all citizens have to pass an exam to be accepted into society. The central character fails after which his girlfriend disappears and the world becomes a much stranger place. This is a carefully crafted story with a twist. I hope it doesn't go on to become over the top. Send #1.00 and an A4 SAE to Ian Welch, 22 Homefield Road, Westbourne, Nr Emsworth, Hampshire P010 8TN.

Angels and Demons, Punks, Cultists and puritans are all out to get each other in **Angels Of Deception #2**. The intended sacrifice victim is still on the run, aided by punk boyfriend and a saint who stepped straight out of the Chippendales. All you 'fist-fest' fans will love this, the only problem I had with it is that the art seems to be getting rushed. Slow it down boys and get it right before you get it out on sale. That aside, if you fancy a totally implausible demon chase across contemporary England, *Angels Of Deception* is guaranteed to at least give some chuckles. Send #1.00 for each issue and an A4 SAE to Alex Wallis, 9 Western Road, Havant, Hampshire, PO9 1 NJ.

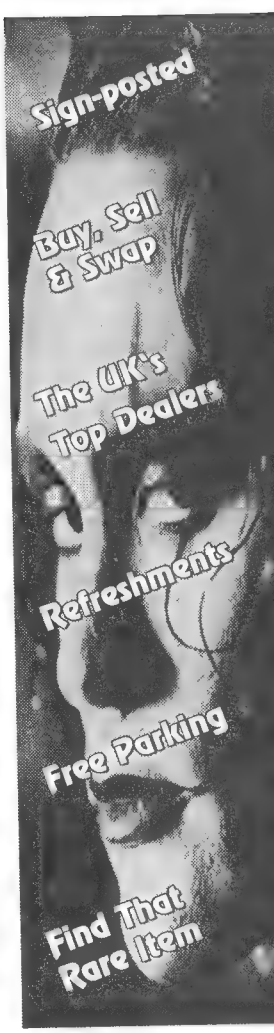
Wow! Is **Bang #7** the strangest comic ever? With art reminiscent of old British comics such as *Eagle* and *Look And Learn* and stories straight out of some warped surrealist timezone, this is bizarre city man! That's all I want to say really. For a short but sweet dose of unreality, send about a pound I guess (another one without a price) and an A5 SAE to Mark Robinson, 53 Heol Coed Cae, Whitchurch, Cardiff, CF4 1HQ.

Tales From Sleaze Castle is up to issue 3 whilst sister publication **More Tales** is up to #71 If anyone would care to send me a complete set I'll try and work this out (yes, that is a cheap attempt at begging, I'm not proud). This issue is far less action packed than most, it concerns itself with advancing certain plot elements and provides a certain amount of character background. Ah what the heck, the Sleaze Castle comics are some of the very best small press produced today. Get your local shop to stock it, buy it yourself and then refuse to lend it to your friends so other people have to buy their own. Sleaze can easily counter the big US competition, if we give it enough support. This issue is a bumper issue and will set you back #1.70 from 33 Windsor Drive, Cleadon, Sunderland, SR6 7SY.



In a freak hallucination I was sure I had reviewed issue 1 of **Sub Rosa**. But no, I missed it, well #2 is here now and Richard Argent's art has become even more intricate if that is possible. WARNING, do not read this while tripping on the tube. You will become a screaming, shivering blob of terror, guaranteed! Yep, it's a drug comic, and Richard has either experienced some truly horrible things in his life, or has the imagination of Hieronimous Bosch. This primo weirdness is best experienced in a malleable frame of mind whilst listening to something like Throbbing Gristle (I know- I've done it!). Buy both issues, #1.80 each plus an A5 SAE to R. Argent, 93 Gainsborough Drive, Westcliffe-On-Sea, Essex, SS0 OSN.

Steve Cook



midnight media

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BOOKS

Ackroyd, Peter *The House of Doctor Dee.* Penguin.
Allen, Thomas B. *Possessed.* Corgi, £4.99. The true story behind The Exorcist, meticulously researched by Allen and describing in detail the best-documented real-life exorcism in history. Jul 28
Anthony, Piers *Demons Don't Dream.* New English Library.
Asimov, Isaac *The Complete Stories Volume 1.* HarperCollins.
Barnes, John *Mother of Storms.* Millenium, £14.99/£8.99 (hc/tpb). The not-so-distant future girds itself for the storm to end all storms. Barnes offers a diverse group of characters and a present tense narrative, and turns in another gripping novel. Jul
Baxter, Stephen *Anti-Ice.* HarperCollins. Reprint.
Baxter, Stephen *Ring.* HarperCollins (hc).
Bischoff, David *Aliens: Genocide.* Millenium. Based on the Aliens series from Dark Horse.
Blaylock, James P. *Night Relic.* HarperCollins. Reprint horror novel.
Bova, Ben & Bill *Pogue The Trikon Deception*. New English Library.
Burt, Guy *Sophie.* Black Swan, £4.99. Burt's second novel, the story of obsessive childhood. Mattie hero-worships Sophie, but she is growing up and their are things in their lives that Mattie only discovers afterwards, when it was too late. Jul 28
Card, Orson Scott *Songmaster.* Severn House (hc).
Cole, Allan & Chris Bunch *The Far Kingdoms.* Legend, £5.99. Magical fantasy with a dashing young seaman setting sail for unknown lands. Well-crafted high adventure. 7 Jul
Cornell, Paul Goth *Opera.* Dr Who Books, £4.99. First of a new series of adventures set within the continuity of the Dr Who tv series and featuring past Doctors. The story here is a sequel to the New Adventure by Terrance Dicks (qv), a modern day vampire tale. 21 Jul
Crichton, Michael *The Terminal Man.* Arrow.
De Haven, Tom *The Last Human.* Roc. Reprint horror novel.
Denton, Bradley *Blackburn.* New English Library.
Dicks, Terrance *Doctor Who: Blood Harvest.* Dr Who Books, £4.99. A P.I. called Dekker investigates the newly opened Doc's speakeasy in 1920s Chicago, where the Doctor and his gun moll Ace are selling illegal liquor. Meanwhile Bernice is abandoned on a vampire-infested planet. See also Paul Cornell's Missing Adventure, above. 21 Jul
Disch, Thomas M. *The Priest.* Millenium, £14.99/£8.99 (hc/tpb). Horror novel. Father Bryce is the pastor of St. Bernadine's, Minneapolis; he's a man with a flaw that threatens to deliver him to his own personal hell. 7 Jul
Dozois, Gardner (Ed.) *The Mammoth Book of Contemporary SF Masters.* Robinson, £5.99. With a title to match the size of the book (over 650 pages), this volume gathers 13 novellas, a few classics, award winners and modern masters. Authors include Jack Vance, Poul Anderson, Cordwainer Smith, Samuel Delany, Brian Aldiss, Frederik Pohl, Gene Wolf, Lucius Shephard and Robert Silverberg, and not a loser amongst them.
Eddings, David *The Shining Ones.* HarperCollins.
Emms, William *Doctor Who the Scripts: Galaxy 4.* Titan, £4.99. One of the missing episodes, idiotically wiped by the BBC. The text comes directly from Emms' script which, compared to a poor audio recording of one episode of the show proves only slightly different from the broadcast version. William Hartnell was the Doctor at the time, trying to save the peace loving Rills from the plans of the evil Drahvins.
Farmer, Philip Jose *More Than Fire.* Pan.
Friedman, Michael Jan *Star Trek: Shadows on the Sun.* Pocket UK, £4.50. Jul 4
Grahame, Kenneth *Fallen Angels.* Nexus.
Gregory, Stephen *The Blood of Angels.* Piatkus (hc).
Halam, Ann *The Haunting of Jessica Raven.* Orion (hc).
Haley, Wendy *This Dark Paradise.* Headline, £16.99. First in a new series of vampire novels opening with the return of Alex Danilov to his family home, only to find them torn apart. But Danilov is no stranger to intimate human secrets: he's preyed on the passions of mortals for a thousand years... Jul
Hubbard, L. Ron *Fear.* New Era. Reprint of classic '40s pulp fantasy, later revised by Hubbard, the creator of scientology.
Ings, Simon *In the City of the Iron Fish.* HarperCollins.
Jefferies, Mike *Stone Angels.* HarperCollins.
Jones, Gwyneth *Flowerdust.* Headline, £4.99. Sequel to Divine Endurance; set in an imaginary South East Asia land of The Peninsula, where women rule and men are either studs or outcasts. The flowerdust of the title is a powerful drug. 14 Jul
Jones, Stephen (Ed.) *The Mammoth Book of Werewolves.* Robinson, £5.99. Solid collection of lycanthropic larks, 23 in all, two classic oldies (by Manley Wade Wellman and Hugh B. Cave), plus modern masters like Clive Barker, Ramsey Campbell, Karl Edward Wagner, Dennis Etchison and others. Also includes original stories by Graham Masterton, Peter Tremayne, Nicholas Royle, Adrian Cole and a long tale by Kim Newman.
Kilworth, Garry Angel. Gollancz, £4.99. Horror novel. Jul Kilworth, Garry Archangel. Gollancz (hc). Horror novel. Jul
Kilworth, Garry *The Electric Kids.* Bantam. Juvenile. Jul
Le Guin, Ursula *The Dispossessed.* Flamingo. Reprint of Le Guin's 1974 Nebula and Hugo Awards winning novel. Jul
Long, James D. *Battletech: D.R.T.*. Roc, £3.99. Based on the game and set in 3057, when fifty years of unhappy peace is about to break down and the clans are about to go to war again. 30 Jun
McAlpine, Duncan *The Comic Book Price Guide for Great Britain.* PGP, £10.95. Vastly expanded to over 800 pages, but still in need of an editor (Comic Collector 'recently' became Comic World? Oh yeh?). Apart from a non-event foreword by Christopher Lee, this one is head and shoulders above last year from the stunning John Bolton cover all the way through to the reasonable price on the back cover. We could argue about prices until the cows come home, but this is worth it for the information it contains alone. If you must count prices, I've yet to find one that went down, but it's less frustrating than Overstreet's 'Cover price or less' cop-out notations.
McConnell, Ashley *Quantum Leap: Prelude.* Boxtree, £3.99. Tie-in to the tv series. Jul
McConnell, Ashley Quantum Leap: *Knight of the Morning Star.* Boxtree, £3.99. Tie-in to the tv series. Jul
McDonald, Ian Necroville. Gollancz, £15.99. In a 21st century nanotechnology has revolutionised death; a third of the population live in Necrovilles, cities of the resurrected. On the Day of the Dead five young living people fulfil a pact and go down to the City of the Dead, Necroville; what they find will change them forever. 21 Jul
McKillip, Patricia A. *The Cygnet and the Firebird.* Pan.
Martin, David *Love Me To Death.* Headline. Reprint horror novel.
Masterton, Graham *Fortnight of Fear.* Severn House (hc). Reprint horror collection.
Masterton, Graham *The Sleepless. Mandarin.* Reprint horror novel.
Morwood, Peter Greylady. Legend, £5.99. First in the Clan Wars series of novels set 500 years before the events of Morwood's best-selling Horse Lords series. 7 Jul
Morwood, Peter *Widowmaker.* Legend, £9.99. Second in the Clan Wars series. Bayrd ar'Talvlyn has successfully formed a new clan, but in landing on the coast of Prytenon he has aroused the anger of the Prytenek and Elthanek clans.
Reichert, Mickey Zucker *The Western Wizard.* Millenium, £4.99.
Rice, *Anne Lasher.* Penguin.
Rigelsford, Adrian *The Doctors: 30 Years of Time Travel.* Boxtree, £14.99. Examination of all seven Doctors with some unique photographs recounted with anecdotes from cast and crew, and where possible the Doctors themselves. Jul
Royle, Nicholas (Ed.) *Darklands 2.* New English Library. Horror anthology.
Shaw, Bob Warren *Peace: Rough Dimensions*. Gollancz, £4.99. Jul
Silva, David B. *The Presence.* Headline, £16.99. 14-year-old Darrell Turner resolves to find his missing father, sighted in horrific circumstances nine months after his disappearance. He finds more than he bargained for at Old Miners Creek. Jul
Skipp, John & Craig Spector Book of the Dead III. Severn House (hc). Reprint horror novel.
Smith, Nyx *Fade to Black.* Roc, £3.99. Based on the game set in 2055 Newark, an overpopulated nightmare land where Rico gathers an eccentric band to free a man from a corporate contract.
Stine, R.L. Fear Street: *The Fire Game.* Archway, £2.99. Young

adult horror series. Jul
Taylor, Roger *Whistler.* Headline, £16.99 (hc). Brother Cassraw is mysteriously transformed into a fiery religious demagogue on a day when clouds gather over Canol Madreth, a remote and mountainous country in the heart of Gyronlandt. Soon the whole of Gyronlandt is threatened by his strange compulsive power and the dark, primitive creed he begins to preach. Jul
Webber, Collin *Merlin and the Last Trump.* Gollancz, £4.99. Runner-up in the Radio 4 Bookshelf/Gollancz First Fantasy Novel competition judged by a team that included Terry Pratchett, this is a Pratchettian romp through a slightly revised medieval history which begins when Lancelot was killed by useless Sir Griswold. 14 Jul
Weis, Margaret & Tracy Hickman *Into the Labyrinth.* Bantam, £14.99. Sixth novel in the Death Gate series: Alfred and Haplo enter the terrifying prison maze with two assassins, one of whom has sworn to take Haplo's life. Jul 28
Weiss, Margaret & Tracy Hickman *The Seventh Gate.* Bantam (hc). Seventh volume in the Death Gate Cycle.
Williams, Tad *To Green Angel Tower 2: Storm.* Legend, £5.99. Oddly the third book in the series Memory, Sorrow and Thorn. Part 3b is the final volume of this best-selling fantasy series woven around three swords which command the fate of Simon, an ex-kitchen hand, and the land of Osten Ard.
Volsky, Paula *The Wolf of Winter.* Bantam, £4.99. Original dark fantasy, weaving history with legend, magic and conspiracy, decadence and desire in the frozen land of Rhazaulle. Jul 28
Vonnegut, Kurt Galapagos. *Flamingo.* Reprint novel. Jul

GRAPHIC NOVELS

Batman: Ten Nights of the Beast. Titan, £3.99. Reprints the four-issue storyarc starring the KGBeast and his mission to assassinate ten prime movers in the Star Wars programme. This was probably Jim Starlin's best work on the series, at a time when Batman was going through a lot of changes (it was shortly after *Year One* appeared) and I recall it fondly. But on re-reading I realise that Batman has gone on to bigger and better things, and like most early steps in a revolution this is very much a bridging story between the old and the new. Still good.
Batman: The Collected Adventures Volume 2. Titan, £3.99. Six issues of *Batman Adventures* in one volume is a must for all fans of the Dark Knight. If you're fed up with the antics in the Batman titles of the past couple of years, here's the solution; a pure, classic Batman in fast-moving action whipped up by writer Kelley Puckett. Mike Parobeck & Rick Burchett stylise Killer Croc, Clayface, Man-Bat, Batgirl and the Dark Knight himself in the best tradition of Eisner's The Spirit.
Judge Dredd in the Cursed Earth. Titan, £9.99. *The* classic Dredd saga wherein Dredd travels across the Cursed Earth to deliver a vaccine to the plague-ridden Mega-City Two. Dredd's companion was Spike Harvey Rotton, Dredd picking up Tweak on the way, meeting the last president of the United States and Satanus on his journey. Pat Mills penned the majority of the story with art by Mike McMahon and Brian Bolland. Still missing are the Burger Wars episodes, but this is still Dredd at his epic best.
Star Trek Deep Space Nine: Emancipation 1. Boxtree, £7.99. By Mike Barr, Gordon Purcell & Terry Pallot. The crew of DS9 face an invasion of a different kind: a Cardassian fungus which releases a toxic gas; then there's the Butcher of Bajor, proud of his mass-murdering past, himself murdered in his bed. It's a lively opening shot across the bows of DS9 fans, although I imagine most of them will already have the Malibu originals.

FILMS

News: Chris Columbus, best known for *Home Alone* and *Mrs Doubtfire* is, apparently, developing a **Daredevil** feature film to follow the **Fantastic Four** film he is already attached to. Before any of this happens he still has to helm *Nine Months* a comedy about pregnancy. Perhaps with the success of *Home Alone* and the spiral for ever younger children to feature in comedy's - *Baby's Day Out* being the latest example - I suppose one about of foetus was inevitable. Wait for next year's sperm comedies.
It seems that everyone wants to do a Marvel comic: James Cameron has **Spider-Man**, and Wesley Snipes is still set to be the **Black Panther.** Richard Donner is no stranger to superheroes, having directed *Superman* as well as the *Lethal Weapon* trio; now Donner/Schuler-Donner, the husband and wife team behind many a blockbuster are working on a live-action **X-Men** movie for Fox. And Gale Ann Hurd has been linked with an **Incredible Hulk** tv movie.
Hurd also has **Virus** in development, based on the Dark Horse comic, and a recent trip to Cannes for Mike Richardson resulted in a three film deal signed with producer Larry Gordon, the three films to be based on **X, Machine** and **Pit Bulls.**
More comics? How about a **Lobo** live action movie from Warners with Joel Silver producing? (There could be one from Village Roadshow Pictures). A new **Modesty Blaise** movie? (Peter O'Donnell has licensed the character to Mirimax for a Bond-style series, the first budgeted at $25 and maybe scheduled as early as 1996). **The Mask II?** (Jim Carrey will be returning to the role next spring, and may also be voicing the character for the animated tv series).
How about tv adaptations? **The Prisoner?** (To star Tim Roth, perhaps to be written by original star Patrick McGoohan, whose name has also been linked with an ITC produced **Danger Man**). **The Saint**? (To star Hugh Grant). **The Avengers**? (scripted by Don McPherson). **Thunderbirds**??? (Renny Harlin has expressed an interest).
True Lies opened in the USA to good reviews and box office, which is good news for Arnie after last summer's failure of *The Last Action Hero* (which should be out on video on September 19). Not such good news for Arnie or Paul Verhoeven, who were to make the $80m **Crusade**; costs escalated to top $100 and Carolco have pulled the plug.
Talking of expensive medieval battles...Mel Gibson's $70m **Braveheart** which he is shooting and directing in Ireland ran into some problems when extras started dropping like flies during a huge battle scene, not from acting but from the heat and a few not-too-serious cuts and bruises. And one scene had to be reshot when three of the 13th century soldiers were seen wearing glasses.
There's always one surprise summer hit, and this year it's Keanu Reeves actioner **Speed** which opened at $23m. Word reaches us that (in Hollywood-speak) it's *Die Hard*-on-a-bus. A sequel is already planned for Reeves' crew-cut cop, Jack Traven. Did your know dept: Speed director Jan De Bont worked as cinematographer on *Die Hard* and *Lethal Weapon 3*.
Emily Lloyd walked out of **Tank Girl** and was replaced by Lori Petty as the shaven-headed boot girl. Allegedly Lloyd refused to have her hair cut and delayed filming for a fortnight, costing United Artists over £1m.
Other casting news: Nicole Kidman is now attached to **Batman Forever** as the love interest, and Kylie Minogue plays Cammy in **Street Fighter.** What's this? Some sort of Aussie take over?
Talking of **Batman**, the film is being made in a huge aircraft-hanger in Long Beach, California, once owned by Howard Hughes and used to house his revolutionary flying boat, the Spruce Goose. The plane was sold after Hughes' death, and the 130-foot hanger made available for the sets of Gotham City and the Batcave when it was discovered that there wasn't an American sound-stage big enough for them.

VIDEO

Warner Home Video have announced a new label: Family Entertainment with a line of cartoons that include Bugs Bunny & Daffy Duck's *10001 Rabbit Tales* feature film, *Dennis*, based on the American comic and starring the annoyingly twee Mason Gamble but is slightly saved by Walter Matthau as his ever-suffering neighbour; better by far is *Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman,* the pilot episode of which (watched by 10.27 million viewers) was released on 1 August.
For fans of live Japaction both **Sonatine** and **Boiling Point** are to be released on the ICA label. Both were directed by 'Beat' Takeshi Kitano of *Violent Cop* fame, currently in the USA filming **Johnny Mnemonic.**
The BBC should just have released the following: **Moonbase 3 Vol.2, Red Dwarf V: Quarantine** (featuring the episodes 'Quarantine', 'The Inquisitor' and 'Terrorform'), and **Doctor Who and the Seeds of Doom,** starring Tom Baker and Elizabeth Sladen.
Over on ITV they've just started showing **Time Trax**, the pilot episode of which is released by Warner (PG) starring Dale Midkiff as Darien Lambert, a Captain in the Fugitive Retrieval Section on the trail of an assassin who killed the President in 2193 and fled back in time to 1993.
A quick mention for Warner's latest releases: **Dave** (15) has the wonderful Sigourney Weaver alongside Kevin Kline, who bears a remarkable resemblance to the President, and accidentally has to become him; and **The Assassin** (18) which I had little hope for. Based on the French thriller *Nikita* it hasn't suffered too much Hollywood-ification in translation. It's glossier and the original is better but Bridget Fonda stands up well, and Harvey Keitel as Victor the Cleaner steals the ending.
And the latest news from Fox Video is that the complete **Star Wars Trilogy** are to be released on September 5, remastered by

Lucasfilm to enhance the picture quality, and offered at £10.99 full-screen and £12.99 widescreen.

ANIME

News: September releases from Manga Entertainment are **Guyver 6, Tokyo Babylon 2, Roujin Z** and **Zeguy** with **Guyver 7, Devilman: Demon Bird** and **Cybercity Oedo** due October. The animated **Secret of Tom Thumb** will be released on widescreen in October, and there's a regional tour of the silver screen for **Appleseed** in August/September.
Kiseki have **Ambassador Magma Eps. 6-7** and **Adventure Duo Part 1** (see panel). Not confirmed as of writing, but September's list is expected to include **Robotech, Starblazers 1: Quest for Iscandar, Return of the Overfiend Ep.3** and a subtitled version of **Black Magic M66.**
Anime Projects have switched their schedule around to bring **Genesis Survivor Guyarth** forward and **Urusei Yatsura Movie 4: Lum the Forever** back slightly. Both should be out by the time you read this. The lower-priced **Bubblegum Crisis 1-4** should be out on 30 August, and 5-8 on 26 September alongside **Urusei Yatsura Movie 5: The Final Chapter.** All are now priced £12.99, and it is hoped that the last remaining £19.99 film from AP - **Riding Bean** - will be available at the lower price in December.
The news from Pioneer is that their European releases will be on video, beginning on October 10 with two episodes each of **Tenchi Muyo** and **Moldiver**. The former in particular already has a strong word-of-mouth fan following in the UK, and Pioneer would seem to be keen to offer an alternative to the usual 18 rated animation that has appeared over the past two years. Two more titles, **Green Legend - Ran** and **Kishin Heidan** can be expected next Spring.
Appleseed (Manga, 15). *Dir* Kazuyoshi Katayama. This is on tour at the moment and whilst it's a welcome release, perhaps an outsiders view is needed here; I tried to distance myself whilst I was watching, but the notion that this was a frustratingly poor adaptation of the Masamune Shirow's original manga *(Appleseed Book 2)* kept popping up. It's fairly basic animation and dub. The setting, the lush, brightly lit Olympus founded in the wake of the Third World War is too light a setting for a film which has some important questions to ask, and whilst it does have an effective middle with some great high points (the terrorist attack scene is particularly effective), the build up and denouement are a let down. 71m.
Guyver Data 5: Death of the Guyver (Manga, 15). *Dir* Koichi Ishiguro. Already a best-seller, the series is actually getting better and better and I'm looking forward to the time when I can sit down and watch all the episodes in one go, as the story is being effectively built up. This episode introduces a Zoanoid capable of releasing an enzyme which can eat through the Guyver armour. The title sort of gives what happens away, but no doubt he'll get better. 26m.
Tokyo Babylon Part 1 (Manga, 15). *Dir* Koichi Chigira. Created by the all-girl group, CLAMP, this first episode revolves around a series of accidents at the Project 5 building site and the investigation of psychic Subaru Sumeragi into their relation with one of the project's directors. The love interest is provided by the sister of deceased company president, the plot sparkles along and shows more imagination than the sleeve would have you believe: the copywriter obviously had one too many before penning "Modern day Tokyo has slipped into a crawling debauched mire of rape, phone sex and sinister religious sects". One of us was reviewing the wrong film, because there's as much debauched rape and phone sex here as there is Hi-Fi Stereo. Ignore the blurb, buy the film. 60m.
Youjyusensen - The Adventure Duo (Kiseki, 18). You'll find information on the *why* of the title elsewhere, but what of the contents? What's so depraving and corrupting about *Adventure Kids* that we have to be cosseted and protected by government appointed officials? The moral fibre of our great nation is here threatened by zombie rapists, which anyone under the age of 18, any kid, would immediately mimic. *Better kill myself*, they will think, *and go and...hang on, I'll be dead*! Don't think of Adventure Duo as a manual for a better life, follow the government instead - get your secretary pregnant then bugger off back to the wife; cruise Hampstead Heath then prosecute people for doing the same; send money to prostitutes in plain brown envelopes and pop back to the office for a bit of insider trading. Screw the economy, destroy all hope of getting a job, then blame crime on watching a Japanese animated movie. Protect the nation by not putting 'Kids' on a video sleeve. *[Pete? You OK? - Steve]*
Norikazu Hanyu plugs into a wartime computer found on his father's estate during reconstruction, and sets off an old demon-summoning programme. That's about the most inventive Toshio Maeda's plot gets; the rest is post-pubescent sex fantasy and collapsing buildings. It's single selling point is its links with *Urotsukidoji,* and you'll find this as good or bad as you found the latter. Whilst I demand the rights to watch this film in its original form and under its original title, sadly I can't recommend it. 52m.

ANIME AND THE BBFC

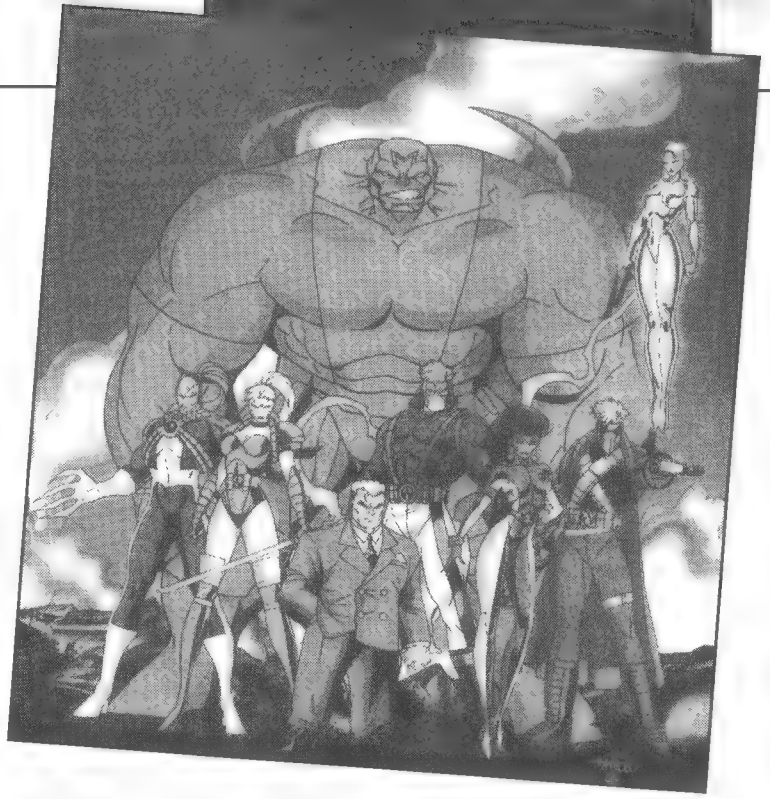
Kiseki have run into some problems with the BBFC over the release of the latest film from the creators of *Urotsukidoji*. **Adventure Kids** is a three-part series featuring some fairly tacky necrophilial rape of young women by zombies - or did so before the BBFC demanded cuts. For connoisseurs the BBFC's cuts included "Remove pan across to left from medium close up of young women's faces being threatened by sword during 'But I don't know about the rest' to remove all sight of tableau of women being multiply raped by zombies in uniform and resume on side view close up of woman saying 'No!'." and two others.

The cuts were made, but the problems didn't end there because the film was still being refused a certificate because of the title. The amendments to the Video Recordings Act which have recently been approved by the House of Lords demands that the BBFC pay special attention to videos which are likely to attract young viewers *despite* being classified for older viewers. "The board must consider those children as potential viewers," Earl Ferrers has said, and the BBFC's argument is that the word 'Kids' in the title was likely to attract young viewers despite the 18 certificate - classification becomes a mockery if your orders are to presume that it doesn't work.

Kiseki offered four alternatives: Adventure Pair, Duo, Boy and Gang. The BBFC's choice was **Adventure Duo**, under which title the film will be released in August.

We look forward to Reservoir Group when it finally gets a certificate.

Pete Taylor



Jim Lee's WildC.A.T.S. will debute on CBS-TV on the morning of Saturday September 17. Also debuting in September will be the WildC.A.T.S. Adventures comic with artwork by Ty Templeton. Jeff Mariotte will be writing the stories which are outside of Lee's continuity.

The news from elsewhere in the Image camp is not good: Erik Larsen has not found a buyer for **The Savage Dragon** or **Freak Force** and both of Rob Liefeld's projects, **Youngblood** and **Badrock** have been passed over.

TRADING CARDS

Comic Images have announced the **Kirby Archives Collector Cards** set for release in October.

The cards include a full portfolio of previously unseen work done for Ruby-Spears Productions. The cards have commentary by Jack's long-time friend Joe Ruby and tributes from other comic industry leaders.
Skybox have reached an agreement in principal with Extreme Studio to become the exclusive manufacturers of Extreme trading cards. Their first release is expected to be a **Youngblood** set in November.

MAGAZINES

Eagle Times v7:2 (Summer 1994). Latest, glossy, 54-page issue, with tributes to the late Keith Watson, features on Mercurian language and the Dan Dare studio, the original synopsis to "The Phantom Fleet", part 2 of an interview with Jack Daniels, and part 5 of a series on Frank Bellamy. Available for £15.50 annual subscription from Keith Howard, 25a Station Road, Harrow, Middlesex HA1 2UA

EVENTS

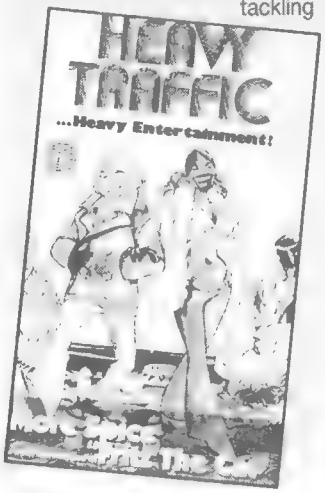
18 Aug **Liverpool**. Bluecoat Concert Hall, School Lane. Comic Mart.
20 Aug **Birmingham.** St Martin's Church, Bull Ring. Collectors Mart.
26 Aug **Lancaster**. Pizza Marguerita. Signing by Dan Abnett & Andy Lanning at 7.30pm organised as part of the Lancaster Literature Festival. Tel: 0524 62166 for further information.
27 Aug **Cardiff**. The Central Hotel, St. Mary's Street. Comic Mart.
27 Aug **Manchester**. Sachas Hotel, Tibb Street, Piccadilly. Comic Mart.
27 Aug **Stoke-on-Trent**. YMCA, Harding Road, Hanley. Comic Mart.
28 Aug **Leicester**. YMCA, Granby Street. Comic Mart.
28 Aug **London**. Royal National Hotel, Bedford Way, WC1. Comic Mart 'Special Edition'.
29 Aug **Brighton**. Brighton Centre. Comic Mart.
3 Sep **Leeds**. Brunswick Hall, Leeds Metropolitan University, Merrion Way. Comic Mart.
10 Sep **Newcastle**. Student's Union Ballroom, University of Northumbria, Sandyford Road. Comic Mart.
10-11 Sep **Glasgow**. The City Halls, Candleriggs. Memorabilia '94 Roadshow. Pop, Film, Comic, TV and SF memorabilia fair.
17 Sep **Bristol.** New Trinity Community Centre, Trinity Road, St. Philips. Comic Mart.
17 Sep **ASTERIX CONVENTION**. The Commonwealth Institute, 230 Kensington High Street London W8 6NQ. Guest of Honour is the legendary Underzo, and there's a full-supporting list of events including quizzes, competitions, special activities for children, all day film show and plenty more to fill the hours of 10am to 6pm. Advance tickets available from publishers Hodder Headline on 071 873 6213.
18 Sep London. T.U.C. Congress Centre, 23-28 Great Russell Street, WC1. Comic Mart.
24 Sep **Liverpool**. Bluecoat Concert Hall, School Lane. Comic & Sci-Fi Mart.
24 Sep **Sheffield**. Main Hall, Sheffield Hallam University, Howard Street. Comic Mart.
25 Sep **Liverpool**. Gladstone Hotel, Lord Nelson Street. Comic Mart.
1 Oct **Manchester.** Bowlers Leisure & Exhibition Centre, Trafford. Memorabilia '94 Roadshow. Pop, Film, Comic, TV and SF memorabilia fair.
1-2 Oct **OCTOCON '94 Fifth National Irish Science Fiction Convention** The Royal Marine Hotel, Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin. Special Guest: Robert Holdstock; Special Comics Guest: Paul Peart. Other guests include Storm Constantine, Robert Rankin, James White, etc. Registration until 1st Sept: £16.00 (attending, £10.00 supporting) adult, £12.00 (£10.00) junior. Cheque/postal order to Octocon, 20 Newgrove Avenue, Sandymount, Dublin 4.

Multi Media was compiled by Jeremy Clarke, Neil Cooper, Steve Holland, Dave McLoughlin and Pete Taylor.

Vintage BAKSHI

JEREMY CLARK LOOKS BACK AT RALPH BACKSHI'S FIRST TWO ANIMATED MOVIES, JUST OUT ON VIDEO

American film maker Ralph Bakshi broke new ground with his debut feature, *Fritz the Cat (1971)*, which gave animated life to Robert Crumb's underground comic character and immediately earned itself a place in history as the first X-rated cartoon. Bakshi followed *Fritz* with a second X-rated epic, *Heavy Traffic* (1973), a slice of urban American low-life which likewise took its cue from the underground even though its substance came from Bakshi himself rather than any specific comics artist.
Considerable acclaim and box office takings indicated Bakshi's position at the forefront of tackling adult material in a medium then synonymous with children's entertainment. His next few films however, whilst no less compromising, met with frequent critical drubbing and constant commercial failure until he retrenched into the more traditional sword and sorcery territory of *The Lord of the Rings* (1978). Bakshi's most recent offering, *Cool World* (1992), turned out a disappointingly juvenile (if technically stunning) riposte to Spielberg's *Roger Rabbit*, but to date, Bakshi has never again scaled the heights of those two early features.



From its opening, with construction workers complaining about the degeneracy of today's youth as one of their number pees off a high-up girdir, *Fritz* satirizes the attitudes of the day much as Crumb's cartoons did. The eponymous cat, who has "fought many a good man and laid many a good woman", leads us through pot smoking bathtub orgies, flees the police (conceived literally as pigs in uniform), through synagogue mayhem, hangs out with blacks trying to be cool but inciting fights through ignorance, and gets involved with drug-addicted terrorists. Towards the end he takes to the road with bathtub orgy girl Winston, but sustaining a relationship for any purpose other than instant sexual gratification proves too much for him.
Populated with the writer/director's own characters, the darker *Heavy Traffic* is executed in an impressive mixture of cartoon animation and live action, a technical area the director would explore further in later work. The live action element is primarily used for footage of a pinball game, bookending the movie and intercut throughout to suggest a hopeless urban fatalism behind its animated microcosm of addicts, transvestites, gangsters, corrupt unions, racists, religious bigots and prostitutes. As in the later *Cool World* the main protagonist is an artist who works at his drawing board, but here the journey takes him through the gritty American social underbelly and marks his transformation - in the company of worldly-wise black barmaid Carol - from naive virgin to streetwise pimp. The pair are glimpsed briefly in live action at the close.
The quality of the animation itself may not quite be in the same league as Disney, but stands up pretty well on the small screen while the content (particularly *Heavy Traffic*) holds its own. Bakshi's subsequent assimilation into less challenging, more mainstream features belies those early works, which even todays feel like two breaths of fresh air.
Jeremy Clarke
*Fritz the Cat (*78m) and *Heavy Traffic* (77m), both certificate 18, are released on video by Arrow Films at £10.99.

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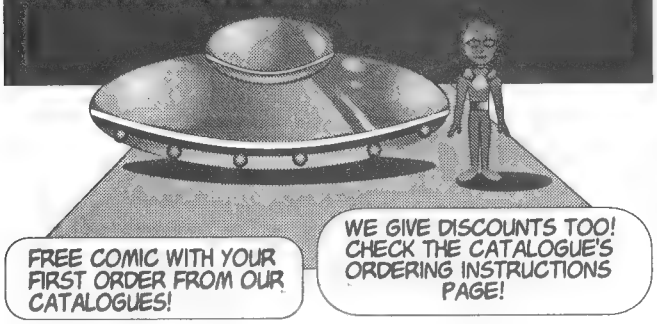

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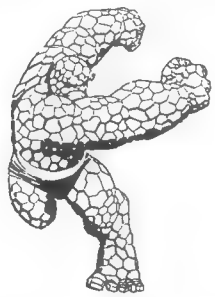

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ABBREVIATIONS

THIS IS A LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS YOU MAY FIND IN THE CLASSIFIEDS & LISTING SECTIONS

M.	Mint Perfect
N.M.	Nearly Mint
V.F./V.F N.	Very Fine
F.N.	Fine
V.G.	Very Good
G.	Good
F.	Fair
P.	Poor
B.S.	Bookshop Stamp on Cover
T.S.	Taped Spine
R.S.	Rolled Spine
M.C.	Marked Cover
W.B	Water Bent
P.S.	Price Stamp

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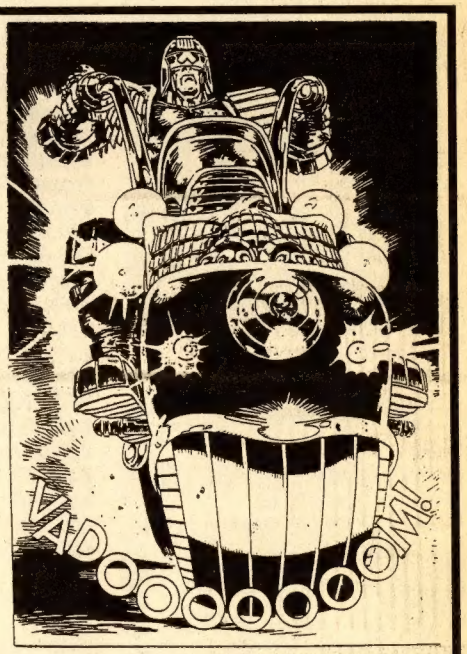

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